

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON ADAPTATIONS TO INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES ON  
THE TRANSITION TO THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Elsie F. Riveiro Torres

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study was to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The central research question that guided the study was based on the purpose of the study: What are the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation to the CCSS? Transcendental phenomenology was the methodological approach in this investigation because the goal was to describe the meanings of the experiences in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit 12 to 15 teachers with a minimum of eight years of experience from one elementary school in the Central Florida area that was the research site. Data were collected from interviews, focus groups, and lesson plans. The data analysis procedure used for this study was the Moustakas' phenomenological data analysis, specifically Moustakas' modification of van Kaam method of analysis. Results of the study were the synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon that represented the entire group as one.

*Keywords:* Common Core State Standards (CCSS), change, instructional practices, transition.

## **Dedication**

This journey is dedicated to my husband Jeff. For all your patience, love, and understanding when I could not do all the fun things we like to do together because I had to lock myself in my office for countless hours at a time to work on this project. To my daughter Lola, the light that guides my life. Thank you for your support, your unconditional love, and for being my personal cheerleader during this process. Nothing in life is impossible when you work hard and put your mind to it. I hope that this accomplishment continues to inspire you to do great things in life. Your success in life is my success. To my nephew Andy. I am so incredibly proud of the young man that you have become. Great things will come your way and I will be right there to celebrate with you. You know Titi loves you.

I love you all!

## **Acknowledgments**

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (BEST)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

English Language Arts (ELA)

Global Academic Essentials Teacher Institute (GAETI)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Center on Literacy Education (NCLE)

No Child Left Behind Act, 2002 (NCLB)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Educational reforms have been taking place for several decades reshaping the way in which teachers deliver instruction (Datnow, 2018). An example of such educational reform is the law of No Child Left Behind (2002). The intended purpose of this law was to ensure that all students achieve academic proficiency in reading, thus placing the students at the same academic level of students from different countries (Paige, 2002). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were the result of such political and educational reforms. The state of Florida adopted the CCSS in 2010 but were not fully implemented until the 2014-15 school year (Haughey, 2020).

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study was to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation to the CCSS. Historical, social, and theoretical background of the research are presented to demonstrate how the study contributes to the theoretical framework. All the assumptions that I bring to the study are thoroughly discussed. The problem presented was that teachers may lack preparedness to roll out the new academic standards where changes are needed in the instructional practices as they transition to the CCSS. The purpose and significance of the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the importance of the different stages teachers go through while embracing the transition process of implementing the CCSS in their instructional practices and its significant use to school administrators and teachers when rolling out new academic changes. Research questions were based on Bridges' transition model and Knowles' adult learning theory and drove the study providing the opportunity for teachers to share their insightful experiences on the transition to

new instructional practices. A summary restates the problem and purpose of the study and provides a conclusion to the chapter.

### **Background**

This section provides a comprehensive historical, social, and theoretical context related to the topic of the teachers' transitional process to change their instructional practices to implement new academic standards, such as the CCSS. Throughout the history of education reform teachers have had to learn and adapt to new mandates to be in compliance with new laws and regulations while they deliver instruction. This process may have an effect on teacher's stress levels as well as their self-efficacy. Dewey's progression education theory and Gardner's theory of intelligences are used as a background to explain the phenomenon presented.

### **Historical Background**

Each generation of students bring a potential change in educational practices (Burks et al., 2015). Going back as far as 1954, when *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* declared unconstitutional segregation in public schools shows that changes in educational practices is nothing new. In 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) allowed students with different disabilities access to the same opportunities for free public education. The standards movement took place in the 1980s, during the controversy regarding testing (Miyamoto, 2008). After *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was published, the appearance of literature focused on the need for more rigorous curriculum and academic standards for public schools emerged (Ravitch, 2000). Ravitch (2000) presented in her book three important documents that had a significant influence on the assumptions that more rigorous and higher academic standards were needed for the nation, as well as the achievement tests to measure the level of academic performance of schools and students: *America 2000: An Education Strategy* (1991); *Goals 2000*

(1994); and No Child Left Behind of 2001. The academic standards are disseminated to the teachers from the top down, which means that teachers have the responsibility to incorporate them in their instructional practices in order to be in compliance with the educational reform mandates (Sobol, 1997). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act was adopted with the intent to make schools accountable for the academic progress of all students focusing on ensuring that both states and schools improve the performance of certain groups of students, such as English-language learners, students in special education, and poor and minority children, whose academic achievement is well below their peers (Klein, 2015). In 2009, the CCSS were developed by members of the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers with the goal to create academic standards that would prepare students to be college and career ready (CCSSC, 2015). All these reforms brought about changes that ultimately teachers had to adapt to in order to be in compliance with their mandates. Changes in academic standards are part of the educational reforms. Studies show that previous academic standards were not successful in learning or teaching because teachers did not fully understand the scope of the standards and their implications (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Spillane, 2004). The lack of success of the previous standards is what spurred the development of new ones which in turn keeps the changes an ongoing event for teachers. The problem is that even though the new standards have gained support from many institutions and despite the rigor that they entail, they do not dictate the methods that are needed in order to implement them (Rothman, 2011). The issue of how prepared teachers are every time they have to roll out new changes and make adaptations to their instructional practices is not new. Thus, the transition process to adapt to changes and the teachers' preparedness to make such adaptations will largely depend on the support of school administrators in the form of professional

development, high quality training, relevant resources, timely feedback, and collaboration with peers.

### **Social Background**

The underlining purpose of the CCSS was to create a set of academic goals to prepare students K-12 for college and the work force (Gewertz, 2015). The rigor of this mandate have made teachers accountable for their students' academic growth and achievement, thus forcing them to focus on what specifically is being tested (Gunn et al., 2016). Teachers have had to adhere and learn new academic standards and make appropriate adaptations to their instructional practices to align with the changes in the standards. This has created higher levels of stress and lower levels of self-efficacy in teachers. Changes in self-efficacy may correlate with changes in instructional practices (Sandholtz & Ringstaff, 2014). In a survey conducted in a study by Matlock et al. (2016), they found that teachers' attitudes towards the CCSS and testing were more negative as the grade level taught got higher and even more negative for those teachers that wanted to leave the profession due to the stress caused by standardized testing and academic standards. The external added pressure of standardized testing can have a negative impact on teachers' instructional practices (Copp, 2018).

Youn (2018) found in his research that teachers have a lower sense of empowerment and higher levels of stress due to the testing mandates that are in alignment with the CCSS. It also causes negative consequences on teachers' professional commitment and sense of community. Matlock et al. (2015), focused their research on teachers' views of the CCSS and its curricular alignment. Matlock et al. (2015) found that teachers were leaving the profession in great part due to the psychological stress of the changes made to the academic standards and testing that are created by policymakers.

## **Theoretical Background**

The CCSS were created with the purpose to prepare students for college and careers and to make students more academically competitive when compared to students of other countries. The CCSS were also intended to compare the academic achievement of students in different states (Nelson, 2015). Before the CCSS were developed and implemented each state had its own set of academic standards for what they wanted the students to learn at each grade level. Consequently, every state had their own interpretation of proficiency (Nelson, 2015). The main purpose of the CCSS is to provide an academic framework of the pre-determined goals and higher expectations of what skills and knowledge students need to learn in order to succeed in college or in the work force (Martinie et al., 2016). To accomplish this task, the new academic standards are more rigorous in nature “allowing students to learn fewer core concepts in greater depth – a formula for challenging them academically, promoting deeper understanding and enabling students to apply what they have learn to their lives” (Jones & King, 2012, p. 39). This notion of the CCSS relates to Dewey’s (1938) progressive education theory where he believed that the curriculum used in the classroom should be relevant to students’ lives and that learning takes place by doing and developing practical life skills. Dewey (1938) also argued that education is effective only when the students have learning opportunities that allow them to make connections with what they are learning and their prior knowledge or experiences.

Another theory that correlates with the development and implementation of the CCSS is Gardner’s (1983) theory of multiple intelligences. His theory had a strong impact in the field of education where it inspired teachers, school administrators, policy makers, and other stakeholders to explore new teaching practices aimed at the different intelligences. With educational reforms, such as No Child Left Behind (2002), teachers are faced with a plethora of

needs in the classroom. Each child comes with a unique set of needs that must be addressed to obtain academic achievement. Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences offers a way for teachers to reach each student's way of thinking and learning. Gardner's multiple intelligences are visual, linguistic, mathematical, kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Teachers are required to incorporate differentiated instruction in their instructional practices based on Gardner's theory of intelligences as they deliver instruction using the CCSS as their framework to ensure that the academic needs of all students are being met (Dolati et al., 2016).

### **Situation to Self**

As an educator, I have experienced the challenges that changes in academic standards and standardized testing have had on teachers, students, and schools as a whole. The intended purpose of these changes goes along with changes in educational reforms. The creation and implementation of the CCSS mandated changes in the way in which teachers deliver instruction. This is where the concept "teaching to the test" comes into play. My motivation for this study is to give teachers a forum to share their experiences on the different stages they have to go through in the transition process of their instructional practices to implement the new standards. The literature shows research on the challenges and benefits that the CCSS has brought to many aspects of teaching and students' learning. However, there is very little research on specific ways in which teachers share their experiences on the process they go through to make the transition from one way to deliver instruction to another in order to accommodate the rigor of the new academic standards. I bring to this study my experiences and assumptions of the phenomenon. My assumptions relate to the axiological philosophical assumption. Under this assumption researchers make their values known in the study in relation to the context by "positioning

themselves” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.21). As the researcher, I will report to the participants my personal experience as a teacher (years of experience, grades and subjects taught) as well as my professional and political beliefs regarding education reform in relation to curriculum and academic standards. Providing this information to the participants will hopefully help participants feel comfortable with the nature of the study. The ontological assumption focuses on the concept of multiple realities as it relates to the objective of the study. The intent is to capture these multiple realities as reported by the participants during interviews, focus groups, and their lesson planning process where they will be sharing their different experiences as well as their perspectives. Under the epistemological assumption, knowledge is construed by closely working with the participants in their work environment to put evidence together based on the views of each participant. The paradigm that will guide the research is social constructivism. Under this paradigm, the goal of the study is to “depend on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Under this paradigm the researcher focuses on the complexity of viewpoints and experiences to develop multiple meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Problem Statement**

The problem presented in this study is that teachers may lack preparedness to make appropriate changes to their instructional practices as they transition to the CCSS. Districts across the country are being challenged because they need to ensure that teachers are well prepared to teach effectively following the new math and English language arts standards (Harrington, 2017). The implementation of the CCSS pose significant changes to instructional practices for which many elementary school teachers are not fully ready to implement. One of the mandates of the CCSS is to ensure rigor in the instructional practices while incorporating the academic standards. Swars and Chesnutt (2016) conducted a study on the subject of mathematics

and how teachers made the transition to the CCSS. The results of their study showed that 70% of the teachers felt that the new standards required a change in their classroom teaching practice and a better understanding of the scope of the standards. Additional training is needed for the new standards because, during prior standards, teachers focused their instructional practices on the memorization of procedures instead of utilizing and understanding the concepts in math problems (Harrington, 2017). In regard to language arts, Ajayi (2016), found in a study conducted with high school teachers that they perceived that the resources, curriculum materials, and professional development were not adequate to teach the high-level standards for language arts. In another study, teachers reported that even in teaching writing their instructional practices have changed because of the CCSS. Troia and Graham's (2016) findings showed that teachers felt that the writing standards are too many to cover, they omit important parts of writing development, and may not be suitable for struggling writers. In order to be efficient in rolling out the writing standards, the teachers felt they needed professional development and a clear understanding of the demands of the standards. The teachers in the study reported that they did not have sufficient professional development or familiarity with the new standards (Troia & Graham, 2016). Teachers in other subjects, such as social studies and foreign languages also experience the same phenomena. Beriswill et al. (2016) conducted a study implementing the Global Academic Essentials Teacher Institute (GAETI) to provide in-service teachers professional development on content, pedagogy, and technology based on the teaching of the CCSS. The findings showed that teachers showed significant improvement in their content knowledge and technological pedagogy after the professional development (Beriswill et al., 2016). Zubrzycki (2016) found in a survey conducted by the Education Week Research Center that teachers preferred coaching, collaborative planning time, or professional development

communities instead of more structured formal training or training online. Zubrzycki (2016) also found in the survey that teachers referred to the early training sessions of common core a matter of compliance. The lack of preparedness to effectively teach based on the CCSS also affects teachers' confidence in their abilities to teach ELL's, students with disabilities, academically at-risk students, and low-income students (Zubrzycki, 2016).

Current literature provides information regarding the teachers' lack of preparedness to incorporate the CCSS in their instructional practices. However, there seems to be a gap on the specific ways in which teachers prepare themselves to roll out the new academic standards and their experiences about the specific phases they go through while transitioning their practices to align with the CCSS. This study will provide significant information to narrow this gap. The data collected from the study will provide specific information on what teachers want and need to be able to learn and understand the academic standards in a way in which they can skillfully adapt their instructional practices. This information can be useful for school administrators, teachers, policymakers, and other stakeholders as changes in education continue to take place.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study was to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation to the CCSS. At this stage in the research, a transition is "the inner psychological process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the new situation that the change brings out" (William Bridges Associates, 1988, p. 2). The theories that guided this study were the Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. According to Bridges' theory, change happens to individuals, whereas transition is a process where individuals

experience as they go through the stages of the change (Janse, 2019). The focus of the model is on the transition to change. The model is based on three stages: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings. Even though often times the purpose of change is to make things easier, safer, or more efficient, people show resistance because of the unknown (Janse, 2019). This transition model applies to the focus of the study in that teachers are faced with changes in academic standards and have to go through different stages (endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings) in their transition to new instructional practices to implement the new academic standards.

Knowles' (1978) adult learning theory focuses on the method of teaching adult learners. There are four principles of the Knowles' adult learning theory that relate to the process of teachers' learning and implementing new academic standards. These principles are: (a) adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, (b) experience provides the basis for the learning activities, (c) adults are more interested in studying subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life, and (d) adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented (Knowles, 1984). These models will drive the study by providing a framework about what are the needed steps involved in each stage of the transition process and what each step entails.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is of significant relevance to teachers, students, and school administrators alike although the implementation of the CCSS affects mainly teachers since they are responsible for the planning and delivery of instruction in accordance with the rigor of the academic standards. However, administrators are held accountable for school outcomes and students are at the receiving end of the educational experiences; they are also relevant stakeholders of this study. Theoretical, empirical, and practical literature support the significance of this study.

## **Theoretical Significance**

The two theories that guided this study were Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. The origins, purposes, and seminal works of these theorists, although different, correlate and are applicable to the nature of the phenomenon of the study. Bridges' theory was useful for managers during periods where organizations had to undergo significant changes. Bridges' transition model has three stages: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges, 1991). The transition process that teachers go through when academic standards change reflect the three stages of Bridges' theory.

Teachers are faced with the end of the previous academic standards. The teachers then have to shift their thinking and planning. This is the core of the change process. During this phase teachers learn and make the appropriate changes to their instructional practices. The final stage is characterized by acceptance and adoption of the change. This study will contribute to and further this theory by providing evidence of the teachers undergoing the process of transitioning to CCSS utilizing the three stages as described by Bridges. Teachers will show this process by sharing their lived experiences on the phenomenon.

The adult learning theory by Knowles (1978) focuses on the learning strengths and styles of adult learners. Knowles theory has been applied to different types of adult learning, especially in the design of trainings to organize different programs. There are four principles of the Knowles' adult learning theory that relate to the process of teachers learning and implementing new academic standards. These principles are: (a) adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, (b) experience provides the basis for the learning activities, (c) adults are more interested in studying subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life, and (d) adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented

(Knowles, 1984). Teachers need to learn and understand not only the purpose of the change but also the nature and the significance of the new academic standards in order to be able to teach them. This study contributed and furthered this theory because teachers underwent a learning process that reflected the principles of the theory. Teachers need to be involved in the planning, they use their experience to further their learning process, the transition is relevant to their job, and they are focused on solving the issue of changing their instructional practices to accommodate new academic standards. Both theories have significant relevance to the purpose of the study.

### **Empirical Significance**

Marzano et al. (2005), stated that “One of the constants within K-12 education is that someone is always trying to change it; someone is always proposing a new program or a new practice” (p. 65). In order for any change to be effective, both school leaders and teachers must have a clear understanding of the purpose and intent of the change and of the transition process that everyone involve will go through to reach the desired outcome. Change is constant and may happen very quickly (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). This study focuses on the transition process that teachers have to go through in their instructional practices in order to accommodate mandated changes in academic standards. Polikoff (2012) found in his research that in order to be alignment between instructional practices and academic standards teachers need to make changes in their instructional practices. The CCSS have been implemented in the last few years in many states without much research regarding their alignment with assessments being utilized by school districts or former academic standards, which has a direct impact on teachers’ delivery of instruction (Beach, 2011). The findings of this study contribute to the literature by providing school leaders, policymakers, teachers, and the scientific community a clear framework of the

transition phases that teachers go through whenever they encounter a potential change in their practices regardless of its nature. Florida Governor DeSantis announced in January of 2020, the creation of new academic standards that will replace the CCSS (Mahoney & Solochek, 2020). The new academic standards are called BEST Standards, which stands for Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking. According to DeSantis, the goal of the new standards is to reduce the differences on how teacher deliver instruction across the state and to create excellent thinkers (Mahoney & Solochek, 2020). Teachers and school administrators will have to, once again, make the appropriate changes and adapt to new academic standards, which makes this study even more relevant. This study fits within the current literature in that it provides a different aspect of the topic of instructional practices and academic standards. The focus is on the different stages of making adaptations to instructional practices to accommodate an educational change based on the teachers' lived experiences.

### **Practical Significance**

The findings of this study inform school administrators, policymakers, and other teachers in the state of Florida about the experiences that teachers have regarding their transition process to the implementation of the CCSS and the direct impact on their daily instructional practices when delivering instruction. This information provides insights for potential changes in professional development for teachers to assist them in making appropriate modifications or adaptations to their current instructional practices to promote alignment between the new academic standards and instruction (Burks et al., 2015). Policymakers also benefit from this information by looking into not just making changes to future academic standards but also including teachers' experiences, views, and ideas in the process (Brown, 2015). This study adds valuable information to the scientific community and to the literature that can be used to promote

the importance and relevance of in-depth professional development and high-quality training for teachers that undergo any type of significant change in the classroom originated by education reforms. This also helps improve teacher behaviors, by-in to changes, and work environment.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study were based on Bridges' transition model and Knowles' adult learning theory. The three stages of Bridges' model are based on endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges & Bridges, 2009). Knowles' adult learning theory is based on the need for adults to be involved in the process of change using their experience as a learning tool. The adult theory also explains why adults are more interested in learning something that influences their job or their lives (Knowles, 1984).

#### ***Central Question:***

What lived experiences elementary teachers have with changes and adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation of the CCSS? This question reflects the purpose of the study and focuses on the processes that teachers have to go through to learn new academic standards and implement them effectively in their instructional practices (Janse, 2019). The history of education reform provides evidence of the multiple changes and adaptations that teachers have had to comply with every time a new mandate or law is put into effect. These changes have a direct impact in their instructional practices as well as how they plan their lessons, use the curriculum or resources, and how they deliver instruction effectively to reach the needs of all their students.

#### ***Sub-Question 1:***

What type of feelings have elementary teachers experienced when faced with the end of previous academic standards to the CCSS? This question reflects the first stage of Bridges'

transition process where teachers may experience negative emotions, such as anger, disappointment, and shock (Bridges, 1991). Teachers need to learn how to manage the loss and understand why the change is necessary. This is also the time when teachers become involved in the planning of the transition using their experience and determine how to solve the problem (Knowles, 1984).

***Sub-Question 2:***

What learning processes have elementary teachers experienced in their preparation to transition to the CCSS curriculum? This question focuses on the core of the process of change. Teachers may feel insecure, confused, or unprepared to implement the new academic standards effectively. Teachers need to learn the depth and scope of the CCSS through professional development and collaboration with peers (Knowles, 1984). This is when new adaptations or changes should be made to the instructional practices as they transition to the new academic standards. This process reflects the neutral zone of Bridges' transition theory (Bridges, 1991).

***Sub-Question 3:***

What are the lived experiences of elementary teachers when they accept and adopt the changes in academic standards brought about by the CCSS curriculum? This question focuses on the last stage of Bridges' transition theory where teachers may be motivated and open to new ideas. They may also understand the purpose of their new roles and how they can contribute more effectively (Bridges, 1991). Teachers are developing new skills or making the appropriate adaptations to their instructional practices as they transition to the CCSS.

**Definitions**

1. *Common Core State Standards* – set of academic standards currently adopted by 42 states meant to prepare students for college and careers and to make the US more competitive

academically. They are benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do in math and reading from kindergarten through high school (Nelson, 2015).

2. *Change* – external event or situation that takes place sometimes quickly and unexpectedly and it is implemented with the intent to make things safer, easier, and more efficient (Janse, 2019).
3. *Instructional Practices* – instructional strategies that teachers use to communicate and interact with students about academic content to engage students in active learning and to facilitate students’ acquisition of specific knowledge and skills (Georgia Department of Education).
4. *Transition* – “Inner psychological process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the new situation that the change brings out” (William Bridges Associates, 1988, p. 2). The starting point of the transition process in the change is not the end result or outcome but “the endings that people have in leaving the old situation behind” (William Bridges Associates, 1988, p. 2).

### **Summary**

The problem presented in this study was that teachers may lack preparedness to make appropriate changes to their instructional practices as they transition to the CCSS. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study was to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation of the CCSS. The literature searched and analyzed reports challenges not just on teachers’ instructional practices but on the lack of preparedness to roll out the new academic standards. However, there seems to be a gap on the specific processes and experiences that teachers go through as they transition to the implementation of the CCSS as it

relates to changes in their instructional practices. The goal of this study was to use the phenomenology method to survey and interview elementary public-school teachers and give them the opportunity to share their lived experiences on the transition process to the changes they have had to make to their instructional practices to accommodate the mandates of the CCSS. The theoretical framework that guided the study is based on the Bridges' transition model (Bridges & Bridges, 2004) and Knowles' (1980) adult learning theory. The phenomenological method described the "lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 14). The main goal of the phenomenology approach is to describe the meaning of the experiences—both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019). The findings of the study are useful for school administrators, policymakers, and other teachers as well. The study also increased the body of knowledge in the literature available on the topic for the scientific community by providing a different aspect of the transition process to new academic standards and teacher preparedness to roll them out effectively.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

The implementation of the CCSS have been the source of vast amounts of research regarding its inception, purpose, goals, and outlook on student academic achievement. Even though the implementation of the CCSS began about ten years ago, teachers seem to still be dealing with the changes in their instructional practices in the transition toward the implementation of the CCSS (Goldstein, 2019). The purpose of this study is to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding the changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation of CCSS. The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. The theoretical framework in this chapter focuses on Bridges' transitional theory and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. Bridges' transitional theory is based on a methodology developed to help individuals and organizations during significant transitions that are part of a big change. The adult learning theory focuses on the process of what adult learners go through as they learn something new. The main principles of adult learning were focused on the development of educational assumptions that targeted the needs of adult students and incorporate their career and life experiences. The related literature section of this chapter provides a synthesis of the research that shows what is known about the implementation of the CCSS (background, inception, goals, rigor, and complexity of standards) as well as what is still unknown (e.g., specific changes to instructional practices to implement the CCSS). The focus of the literature is on the level of teacher preparedness to implement the CCSS, professional development and teacher collaboration, teacher effectiveness in delivering instruction, changes to instructional practices, transition to the CCSS, and teachers' views of the implementation of the CCSS. The chapter ends with a succinct summary of what it is known in

the literature, what is not known, and how this study will help narrow the gap in the existing literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theories that encompasses the framework to guide this study and allow the results to demonstrate the context of this study are Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. The origins, purposes, and seminal works of these theorists, although different, correlate and are applicable to the nature of the phenomenon of the study. Both theories have been applied in prior research related to the topic of this study, adding to the body of literature and establishing the significance of the study.

#### **Bridges Transitional Model**

Bridges' change management theory is based on his transitional model. Bridges' transitional model (1991) is part of the framework that will guide this study. Bridges was a speaker, consultant, and author who, through his research, developed a methodology to help individuals and organizations during significant transitions that are part of a big change (William Bridges Associates, 1988). His main goal was to help members of management accomplish understanding and purpose during periods where organizations undergo significant transformation. Bridges explained that transition is an internal process that needs sensitivity, understanding, and a good plan to get through it in a productive way (Bridges, 1991). Bridges (1991) first explains the difference between change and transition. Change refers to the external event or situation that takes place. For purposes of this study, the change relates to teachers being presented with a radical change in academic standards where they have to make adaptations to their instructional practices in order to be in alignment with the new standards. In order for a change to be effective, leaders have to address the transition process that individuals go through

during the change (Janse, 2019). Change often takes place to make processes more efficient, safer, and easier (Janse, 2019). Transition is the “inner psychological process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the new situation that the change brings out” (William Bridges Associates, 1988, p. 2). This is the process that teachers go through as they assimilate and make the appropriate adaptations to their instructional practices to accommodate the change imposed to their delivery of instruction (Janse, 2019). Bridges’ transitional model has three stages: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges, 1991). The first stage of the transition takes place when people realize that they are losing something or that something is coming to an end, and they have to learn how to manage the loss. People may experience negative emotions, such as anger, disappointment, and shock (William Bridges Associates, 1988). These may be some of the feelings that teachers may experience as they let go of the old academic standards and way of teaching them and realize that imminent changes will take place as they implement new academic standards. The second stage of the transitional model is the neutral zone (Bridges, 1991). This is the core of the change process. This is where individuals learn to deal with the shifts in thinking, planning, and adapting to the CCSS. People may feel insecure, confused, and impatient as they get used to the new processes or procedures (Bridges, 1991). During this stage, teachers learn the new processes and make appropriate adaptations to their instructional practices. At this time, school administrators should be providing support in the form of professional development and continuous training for teachers to have a clear understanding of the need for the change and the mandates of the new academic standards (Burks et al., 2015). The last stage of the transition model is the new beginning (Bridges, 1991). This is where individuals accept and begin to adopt the change. Individuals may be motivated and open to new ideas. They may also understand the purpose of their new roles and how they

can contribute more effectively (Bridges, 1991). At this stage, teachers are developing new skills or making the appropriate adaptations to their instructional practices as they transition to the CCSS. If school administrators have been supportive of the transition process by providing the necessary resources, then teachers' experiences during this time are more positive than during previous stages and open to the transition to make changes (Janse, 2019). These are precisely the responses that this research is attempting to elicit from the teachers' reported experiences.

Cheng (2015) used the transition model to present the changes and potential challenges that students experience in their transition to higher education. Transition is understood as an ongoing process where support from leaders or management need to be adjusted accordingly (Jindal-Snape, 2010). The model effectively described the experiences that the students go through in their transition to higher education in Cheng's research (2015). Miller (2017) used Bridges' transitional model in a case study where library leaders at the Butler University Libraries were charged to implement transformative changes where they needed to migrate to a cloud-based integrated library system that streamlined workflows and drove reorganization. The challenge was in helping employees to embrace and implement the changes necessary for transformation. Bridges' transitional model provided the leadership team at Butler University Libraries with an effective process for minimizing disruption and discord during a transformative system migration. The organization was able to obtain the anticipated outcome. Bridges' transitional model is of significant value to the framework of this study because it is an efficient tool to present the sequence or phases of the teachers' transition process and what takes place during each one.

## **Knowles' Adult Learning Theory**

Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997) was an influential figure in the field of adult education. He developed the adult learning theory as a method of teaching adult learners called andragogy (1978). Andragogy is a concept that refers to any type of adult learning (Kearsley, 2010). The main principles of adult learning were focused on the development of educational assumptions that targeted the needs of adult students and incorporated their career and life experiences (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 2012; Lindeman, 1926). The foundation of Knowles' work comes from his influential mentorship with Eduard Lindeman (1926). Lindeman (1926) believed that the process of learning was an on-going goal and should be understood at the adult level in order to enable adults to learn continuously throughout their lives. The focus of previous research has been on pedagogy (teaching children), however, Knowles determined that there are significant differences in the ways in which children learn as opposed to adults (Knowles, 1978). Knowles focus shifted to the learning strengths and styles of adult learners (Kelly, 2017). Knowles (1978) based his adult learning theory on the concepts learned from Lindeman (1926): (a) adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs that learning will satisfy; (b) learning is self-centered through life situations; (c) experience is the richest source; (d) adults have a deep need to be self-directing; and (e) adult learners need individualized learning (Kelly, 2017).

The adult learning theory developed by Knowles has been applied to different types of adult learning, especially in the design of trainings to organize different programs (Knowles, 1984). A good portion of the research conducted on andragogy presented positive results in other professional settings, such as education. Andragogy can be used for professional development to improve instructional practices or implement new educational reforms (Henschke, 2013). Knowles et al. (2015) proposed a process model where adult learners are geared to self-direct

their learning experience by using the assistance of a facilitator who provided material or resources to enhance their understanding of the content. In this model, a facilitator determines the procedure that the adult learners will follow to gain new knowledge. The process of andragogy can be flexible and adaptable to align with all types of learning needs. In contrast, a content model, an instructor provides pre-selected information. By combining the andragogy principles and a process model with professional development or training that is focused on specific content, teacher can have the responsibility, control, and the flexibility to learn new content without the intervention from someone outside. The main component of andragogy is that adults have extensive knowledge due to experiences. Acquiring more knowledge by sharing ideas with others or through past experiences makes it a fundamental component. Knowles et al. (2015) expressed that the main resource for learning new information comes from the adults that share and participate in activities to help their peers. Utilizing the concept of andragogy enables school districts to meet the demands of new educational reforms while it allows teachers to have a voice and input on the relevance of their learning. When teachers' input is not present their learning needs are neglected, and skill gaps occur. Andragogy enables teachers to focus on their learning process as well as the content according to their needs. According to Knowles et al. (2015), the andragogical process for learning to takes the following steps: (a) preparing the learner, (b) establishing a climate that is conducive to learning, (c) creating a mechanism for mutual planning, (d) determining the needs for learning, (e) formulating program objectives, (f) designing a pattern of learning experiences, (g) using appropriate technology and resources, and (h) evaluating the learning outcomes and re-determine the learning needs. Examples of how this theory has been applied to different training programs is the design of personal computer training, online learning, library instruction, and instructional practices (Arghode & Brieger,

2017; McCall et al., 2018). Freedman et al. (2012) conducted a case study applying the adult learning theory to health literacy. Marschall and Davis (2012) used the theoretical principles to teach critical reading skills. Gilstrap (2013) demonstrated the usefulness of the principles of this theory by applying them in a curriculum design to ensure that the outcome of the programs and courses are relevant to the students. Knowles (1980) describes his theory as “a set of principles applicable to most adult learning situations” (p. 47).

Knowles’ adult learning theory presents an appropriate framework for the phenomenon of this study, especially in the area of transitioning to the implementation of new academic standards. Teachers need to be knowledgeable in the content area they are teaching, but also have to learn the meaning and significance of the new academic standards as well as how to implement them in their instructional practices. There are four principles of the Knowles’ adult learning theory that relate to the process of teachers learning and implementing new academic standards. These principles are: (a) adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, (b) experience provides the basis for the learning activities, (c) adults are more interested in studying subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life, and (d) adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented (Knowles, 1984). Hargreaves and Fullman (2012) presented through their research the importance of transformation of the education system by providing teachers opportunities to be responsible for their own learning. Teachers undergoing the phenomenon of the study need to have a clear understanding of the need, purpose, and intent of what they are being asked to learn, in this case the CCSS and how to apply them effectively into their instructional practices. They need to be involved in the learning process as well as how they will be evaluated once they put into practice what they have learned and how well it serves the students. Teachers learn the significance,

rigor, and relevance of the new academic standards by putting into practice what they have learned through carefully developed activities. Making mistakes during this process is part of the experience (Knowles, 1984). Teachers are more receptive to learn and be part of the process of rolling out new academic standards when they fully understand and accept the relevance of what they have been asked to learn to their jobs as educators. Learning the CCSS entails learning to deliver quality instruction based on the specific skills so students can achieve academic success. The focus should be on the problem, which is ensuring that teachers are well-versed in the new academic standards and how to implement them in their revised instructional practices.

### **Related Literature**

The main goal of the CCSS is to provide a clear and consistent understanding of the content knowledge and skills that all students at secondary and elementary levels need to master in reading and mathematics in order to be prepared for college and the work force (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2013). The CCSS is a challenging reform in the historical background of academic standards where neither school administrators nor educators were fully prepared to meet such challenge (Adams & Miller, 2015). There are critical questions regarding the level of teachers' preparedness to implement the CCSS (Rothman, 2012). The research that has been conducted in an attempt to answer some of these questions are not always forthcoming because of the ways in which researchers conduct their research. Often times, estimates of teachers' preparedness may come from single item surveys, teachers' evaluations, or comparisons of competence of teachers in different schools, districts, or states (Adams & Miller, 2015). The level of teachers' preparedness may also differ according to the teachers' abilities to teach students with disabilities, second language learners, or low achievers as well as the level of training from professional development, years of experience, or graduate degrees (Clotfelter et

al., 2007; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007; Kane et al., 2008). Considering teachers' perspectives and experiences on the topic as well as specific answers to the question of teachers' preparedness is essential to fill the gap in the literature.

### **Teacher Preparedness to Implement the Common Core State Standards**

As the process for teaching the CCSS becomes more complex, it is pivotal to understand teachers' self-perceived level of preparedness to accomplish this goal (Liou et al., 2016). The new academic standards require a rigorous content focusing on critical thinking across different disciplinary knowledge. This leads to different types of phases during its implementation across school districts (Hulce et al., 2013). In order for the implementation of the new standards to be successful, teachers need to be fully prepared (Ewing, 2010). Teachers must have a clear and deep content knowledge to fully understand the rigor and mandates of the standards. Teachers need to adapt to new ways to deliver instruction with appropriate mastery to reach every student with different abilities and be committed to teach the standards with fidelity and in alignment with the curriculum (Ewing, 2010). Teacher preparation and professional development for implementing new academic standards should perhaps start in higher education (Kober & Renter, 2011). Educators need to have extensive training and knowledge on how to differentiate instruction and implement their expertise in the instructional practices. Regardless of the subject being taught, teachers also need crafted curriculum that not only aligns with the standards, but also brings them to life, as well as appropriate textbooks, digital materials, and interim assessments that go hand in hand with the standards (Finn & Petrilli, 2010).

Research shows that there are vast amounts of information on the nature and intended purpose of the CCSS. The standards, however, do not provide a set of instructions for teachers on how to roll them out for students. There is literature that demonstrate teachers' perceptions on

their level of preparedness to implement the standards but very limited empirical evidence on actual level of preparedness, how teachers need to prepare themselves, what they need from their school districts and policy-makers to roll out these standards effectively in the classroom, and how it affects their instructional practices. Liou et al. (2016) provides an example of such research. Their findings indicated that teachers liked the fact that the standards are focused on critical thinking, that they are consistent across grade levels, and that they connect with real-world problems. However, both, elementary and secondary teachers, expressed a greater need for more professional training and guidance for the effective implementation of the CCSS.

### ***Professional Development to Prepare Teachers for the Common Core State Standards***

Even when organizations are being successful, there are always efforts in place to make innovations (Silver et al., 2019). Professional development is a fundamental resource to support any educational reform (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Patton et al. (2015) found in their research that teachers enjoy and are more receptive to professional development when it relates directly to their instructional day. Professional development allows teachers to update and expand their knowledge, but also to share a vision for student learning, opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, and time to practice and master new skills (Lee & Buxton, 2013). The main goal of professional development is to learn new skills, enrich current skills and expand their professional growth to improve their instructional practices in the classroom. The research conducted on professional development has created a general agreement about the main principles in the design of learning activities and experiences that can have a significant impact on teachers' instructional practices and knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Desimone (2009) sustained that effective professional development has a rigorous content focus, fosters active learning and collaboration, is in alignment with the curriculum, and provides the appropriate

time frame for participants. Darling-Hammond (2017) identified through research seven characteristics of effective professional development: (a) professional development must be content-focused, (b) it incorporates active learning opportunities using the adult learning theory, (c) it fosters collaboration among peers, coaches, school administrators, and other experts, (d) utilizes models of effective practices, (e) provides coaching, (f) provides opportunities for feedback and reflection, and (g) duration is sustained. The most effective and successful professional development may incorporate some of these characteristics together. Professional development that is focused on the content that teachers teach has a greater impact on student achievement. Because this type of professional development focuses on specific subjects such as, science or mathematics, it is often provided in teachers' classroom with students. This type of professional development allows the teachers to study more in depth their students' work, test out new resources and curriculum, or study a specific area of students learning of interest (Darling-Hammond, 2017). An effective professional development should address how teachers learn but what they learn as well. Trotter (2006) provided several theories of learning and adult development that should be considered when designing professional development: (a) adults come to professional development to learn with experiences that need to be used as a new resource, (b) adults should have the freedom to select their learning opportunities based on their needs, experiences, and interests, and (c) reflection and feedback should be an integral part to the learning experience. These theories support the rationale of why the professional development that utilizes active learning experiences fosters student academic growth. Collaboration is an essential part of a well-design professional development. Collaboration can take place in the form of one-on-one small group interactions to exchanges with other experts outside the school. This type of professional development is most effective for teachers that work that do not have

access to these types of learning opportunities in their school districts. The use of professional development with curricular and instructional models allows the teachers to have a vision of their practice while they enhance their learning and growth process. Examples of modeling professional development are demonstrating how lessons are conducted, different examples of teaching either video or written, peer observations, modeling unit or lesson plans, and resources for curriculum, such as assessments and student work samples. Experts, such as coaches, may play an important role in guiding and facilitating opportunities for teachers to learn in the context of their practice. Professional development that provides feedback and allows opportunities for reflection as optimal components for adult learning fosters gains for student learning. Feedback and reflection work together to help teachers get closer to their visions of practice that they have learned during professional development. Effective professional development needs time and appropriate implementation. A sustained professional development that has a high chance of changing teachers' instructional practices and student learning is one that provides multiple opportunities for teachers to participate in learning activities on a specific set of practices (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Hough (2011) found in a mixed method study that the most effective and appropriate professional development had support from school leadership, alignment with school's mission and vision, presentation done by experts in the field, alignment with teachers and students' needs, and was compatible to the experience and background of teachers. The results suggested that effective professional development promotes a common goal and vision and is differentiated according to teachers' needs (Hough, 2011). Frank et al. (2011) found in their research that differentiation of professional development was the most essential way to influence teachers who are responsible for implementing changes in their instructional practices. Dixon et al. (2014)

propose that one of the goals of effective professional development is that it must increase teacher self-efficacy beliefs in order for teachers to learn or change their instructional practices. Professional development should take place over a period of time, not short-term basis because teacher responses can change over time as they master the new skills and feel more competent (White et al., 2012). Gibson and Brooks (2012) found in a research study a group of teachers who had to make changes in their instructional practices to implement a new curriculum for social studies that the quality of professional development that the teachers received determined how much teachers grappled to implement the new changes to their instructional practices. Teachers in this study also reported, according to Gibson and Brooks (2012), that the professional development must have purposeful and intentional training on how to implement the changes to the new curriculum to their lesson planning.

How teachers respond to professional development depends on the experiences that teachers share and their personal characteristics (Dingle et al., 2011). Dingle et al. (2011) found that there are some factors that may influence teachers to change their practices such as, prior content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and proper curriculum in alignment with new changes being implemented. The data analysis from the study showed that new teachers were more eager about implementing new practices while veteran teachers who had extensive content knowledge were more apprehensive to change their instructional practices. Dingle et al. (2011) reported that teachers' reactions to change depends on the individual. This can present a problem for school administrators not just to find successful ways to motivate teachers to embrace and implement the changes but to develop and implement effective professional development to achieve the desired effect. Waldron and McLeskey (2010) determined after their research that in order to

successfully implement changes in instructional practices, three components are present: high quality professional development, development of a collaborative culture, and quality leadership.

In the case of the implementation of the CCSS, professional development is a pivotal part of the process and understanding the significance and potential of the standards (Barrett-Tatum & Smith, 2017). Since the main purpose of the CCSS is to provide a consistent set of standards that are implemented across schools, districts, and states to ensure equality of academic opportunities for all students, then the teacher preparation for the implementation of the new standards should be consistent across the board as well (Barrett-Tatum & Smith, 2017). When an educational reform, such as the CCSS, is mandated without the appropriate research-based professional development to enable the implementation, the chances for the reform to be effective or successful are low (Lee, 2011). Patton et al. (2015), found that appropriate and effective professional development is comprised of teachers and fosters opportunities for active learning where teachers can enhance their skills, expand their knowledge, reflect on their practices, and plan effective lessons and assessments that align with the curriculum and the academic standards. Research conducted by Knowles et al. (2015) reported that teachers prefer a process-driven model where knowledge and skills can be shared freely among all teachers. Moretti et al. (2013) found in their research that the majority of the teachers felt responsible for their professional development, and they welcomed the responsibility. Teachers became more engaged in the professional development when they felt in control over their learning and enjoyed when they were able to choose what they wanted to do. In their research, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014), Jacob and McGovern (2015), and Kennedy (2016) provided reports that teachers were not satisfied with their traditional professional development. Their main complaints included lack of content and alignment to their curriculum, short sessions,

improper implementation and improvement in teaching practices, and the absence of specialized focus to improve teaching quality. Teachers' perceptions can improve when the professional development design includes andragogy and when the teachers' involvement is in alignment with their experiences and knowledge (Knowles et al., 2015). The specific topics that are addressed in professional development need to relate to the content that is being taught in the classroom and that is relevant to each teacher (Jacobson, 2016). What is relevant to one teacher may not be relevant or important to others. This concept applies to the implementation of the CCSS because not all teachers teach the same subject or grade level, therefore, the professional development design to address the rigor and mandates of the new standards must be addressed separately based on subject, grade level, and teachers' experience with the content. The professional development also needs to be in alignment with students' needs in the classroom. Louws et al. (2017) reported that the teachers' years of experience and practice as well as student demographics require a differentiated learning focus instead of a uniform one.

In a study conducted by McLaughlin et al. (2014), educators from several counties in California reported that the professional development they had did not provide adequate time to understand the standards enough to align them to their instructional practices, therefore, teachers did not feel prepared to fully implement the standards. The teachers also reported that the quality of the professional development was poor and was different from the professional development offered in other districts (McLaughlin et al., 2014). Burks et al. (2015) discovered in their research that less than 50% of school districts planned professional development to implement the CCSS even after many states adopted them. Seminars and workshops that are provided to teachers only one time are not effective professional development when the goal is long-term changes in teachers' instructional practices (Snow et al., 2014). The allotted time that teachers

are provided to participate in professional development or any other type of training to enhance their skills may have an influence on their willingness to make the appropriate changes to their instruction to implement the standards (Smith & Desimone, 2003). Sustained and consistent opportunities for professional development need to be in place for teachers to learn the standards, create lessons and activities that align to the standards, collaborate with other teachers, and fully implement the standards in their instructional practices (Hochberg & Desimone, 2010).

It is important to understand how school leaders and districts can effectively support the implementation of academic standards. Research suggests that school districts play a pivotal role in implementing the standards (Durand et al., 2016). This goal can be accomplished by providing supporting and effective professional development opportunities for teachers as well as the appropriate curriculum materials to roll out the standards in their appropriate context (Kane et al., 2016). Professional development for educators is a detrimental component of education reform to improve learning and teaching. Teachers that are considered to be highly effective need to reflect on their practices and learn new approaches to deliver instruction effectively in accordance to education reform mandates (Ingvarson et al., 2005). In a normal school day, teachers use the same resources, materials, and teach to same curriculum, as mandated by their school district. Teachers also cover the same academic standards, however, the students do not necessarily make the same gains academically. The two factors that are different among classrooms are the teachers and their instructional practices. When students do not achieve the desired academic gains, an intervention is designed and implemented to foster academic improvements for those students. These interventions require a change in instructional practices. The change in instructional practices may require teachers to undergo an intervention in their delivery of instruction. The purpose of any intervention is to make an improvement, therefore,

the intervention for teachers would be in the form of professional development (Cohen & Ball, 2011). If the professional development is standard-based, it will have better chances to make changes on what teachers know and are able to accomplish, which in turn will foster changes in their instructional practices. Once teachers show improvement in their new practices, students will be more likely to achieve their academic goals (Garet et al., 2001). According to the research conducted by Garet et al. (2001), professional development must show three important features in order to have an increase on the level of knowledge, skills, and changes in the classroom for teachers: (a) the focus should be on content knowledge, (b) alignment with other learning activities, and (c) provide opportunities for active learning. Teachers want professional development that is directly connected to what they teach on a daily basis and to the students they teach in order for the professional development to be meaningful.

There are several types of professional development that are geared towards eliciting high quality instructional practices for teachers. The most common type of professional development for teachers is in the form of a workshop where the participants listen to a presenter provide information on new content and skills. Garet et al. (2001) found in their research that this method of professional development does not provide a high impact on the intended purpose of the professional development, which is enhancing instructional practices for teachers and improving student learning. Gulamhussein (2013) reported that teachers' instructional practices were not influenced by the professional development because they did not feel it was useful or related to them. Marzano and Toth (2013) shared that when professional development is intensive, content-focused, and sustained it can create positive change in teachers' instructional practices. An example of this type of professional development, according to research they focused on, is online professional development. This type of professional development shows better chances to

improve pedagogical practices and content knowledge. Yoon et al. (2007) projected three ways in which professional development can affect student academic achievement: (a) it can improve teacher knowledge and skills, (b) improved classroom teaching, and (c) higher student academic achievement. Guskey (2014) reported that professional development needs to be planned with a specific determined goal. The planning process may start by determining the desired outcomes if the ultimate goal is to improve student learning and academic achievement. When teachers' skills and knowledge increases, school districts will more likely see an increase in students' learning gains over a period of time.

### ***Teacher Collaboration to Implement the Common Core State Standards***

Another powerful way to implement the CCSS effectively is through teacher collaboration or networking (Hodge et al., 2016). The implementation of the CCSS seems to be more productive when educators are engaged in the process and when they have the adequate time to collaborate with colleagues and share their expertise (Awsumb, 2014). Teachers are able to reflect more in-depth in their instructional practices when their professional knowledge is based on collaboration with peers, a shared vision, and data that confirms that the changes needed are effective (Hannay & Earl, 2012). Teachers have the potential to create communities that can change the culture and way of instruction in a positive way for an entire school district, school, or even an entire grade level when they work collaboratively. Teacher collaboration is another important piece of implementing a change as opportunities for effective collaboration foster teachers' self-reflection. An online survey conducted by the National Center on Literacy Education (NCLE) in 2013 showed that middle school teachers that responded to the survey had four specific messages to make the transition to CCSS a success: (a) speed up the transition by maintaining teachers engaged in the design of instructional practices; (b) make collaboration

time purposeful by focusing on effective instructional tasks; (c) include teachers from all disciplines in the transition process; and (d) allow teacher autonomy to create and design lessons that are appropriate for students' needs and are in alignment with CCSS. Engaged teachers make more progress towards the implementation of the CCSS when they have time with colleagues to discuss in depth the meaning of the standards and when they have a voice in how their school is working towards the implementation of the CCSS (Awwsumb, 2014).

Allen et al. (2011) researched a program where teachers in a Virginia high school worked in collaboration with a one-on-one coaching program designed to enhance interactions between students and teachers. After participating in an initial workshop teachers had a coaching session twice a month with a remote mentor. Teachers were to submit samples of their practice in the form of videos, they had opportunities to reflect on their instructional practices, and answer questions regarding the relationship between instructional practices and student engagement and academic growth. The results showed that there was an increase in student academic growth and engagement from a 50<sup>th</sup> to 59<sup>th</sup> percentile. Collaboration can also take place at the school where teachers can focus on a specific goal, such as improving literacy for low-performing students or district level where the intended purpose is bring large-scale improvement to teaching and learning (Allen et al., 2011). Teachers that are part of a collaborative team have the most success when they have the opportunity to co-create lessons and activities, co-create assessments that align with the standards, when analyze student work together, and provide feedback to each other (Supovitz et al., 2016). Administrators and coaches play an important role in the teachers' social network, which suggests that teachers are looking at the appropriate individuals to gain more knowledge. The purpose of this new knowledge is to ensure that it reflects into new instructional practices conducive to the implementation of the CCSS (Supovitz et al., 2016). Allowing

teachers to work together to decipher and understand the mandates of the standards is one of the most important ways to elevate the level of preparedness (Awsumb, 2014).

### **Teacher Effectiveness in Delivering Instruction**

The skills and knowledge that teachers must master in order to become highly effective in their delivery of instruction is a very complex process and ever-changing, in great part, due to changes in education reforms, such as the CCSS. Placing highly effective teachers in the classrooms is a pivotal key in the process of improving the education system and school reforms. There is not, however, a specific way to measure or identify teachers' effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Goodwin (2010) suggests three behaviors to look for to distinguish highly effective teachers: (a) teachers that are considered highly effective strive to challenge students by having high expectations and providing instruction that fosters higher-order thinking skills, (b) positive classroom environments where teachers make connections with students, and (c) teaching is intentional where learning goals and instructional strategies are in place. These kinds of teachers have better chances to have the desired effect on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). Highly effective teachers know their content and how to deliver it to their students by using classroom management techniques, instructional practices and a curriculum in a flawless and fluent manner (Marzano, 2003). In a report titled *State of America's Schools*, Gallup (2014) reported that highly effective teachers share some patterns: (a) teachers are motivated to enable students to achieve academic success, (b) balance of discipline and planning, and (c) development of meaningful relationships between students, parents and teachers. Stronge et al. (2008) tested in their study the impact that teachers may have on student achievement and learning. They found a difference of 30 percentile points corresponded to the highly effective quality of teaching that took place in the classroom during one academic year. The process for

teachers to maintain their highly effective status is ongoing. Teachers must continue to collaborate with their peers and participate in professional development, especially when they experience changes in curriculum or academic standards (Wenglinsky, 2001).

### **Changes to Instructional Practices**

Change is an unavoidable and a constant phenomenon in P-12 education. The need for change needs to be clearly understood in order for school systems to adapt to those changes and keep up with further innovations (Lopez, 2015). The Common Core Reform began in 2009 (Burks et al., 2015). By 2015, a total of 45 states had adopted the CCSS. The CCSS has been the cause of changes in the way in which teachers deliver instruction. Teachers have had to make changes to previous instructional practices to accommodate the new academic standards, as well as the mandate for alignment of testing to the new standards. The new education reforms have made teachers more accountable for the academic performance of students on standardized testing, therefore, the new instructional practices need to focus on the knowledge that students need to show proficiency in a standardized test instead of probing deeper into academic goals and instruction to make deeper connections and provide students with opportunities to establish meaning from the world around them (Santman, 2002; Volante, 2006). In order for teachers to be in compliance with the accountability demands of the CCSS, they have to make a shift in their instructional practices to determine the objectives and subjects that take priority for standardized testing (Murnane & Papay, 2010). This may propose a challenge for teachers where they need to meet the demands of the CCSS and ensure that students are receiving the academic education they need. Teachers may want to focus their lessons on testing strategies and content. However, with new academic standards and testing that goes along with the standards, teachers may have difficulties with making changes in their instructional practices to accomplish this goal (Longo,

2010). Teachers need to make adjustments to their instructional practices in their teaching and in the way they view and understand the academic standards. Teachers may face challenges when the focus is solely on the standards that will be tested (Botzakis et al., 2014).

There is a variety of instructional practices that teachers utilized in their daily delivery of instruction. The selection of the instructional practices may depend on the different needs of the students, the curriculum, standardized testing, and educational reform (Teague et al., 2012). The use of different instructional practices provides an opportunity for teachers to make connections with their students while allowing the students to achieve academic success at their level and be in compliance with the latest educational reform. Teachers also use instructional practices that they learn through professional development and research studies. One of the instructional practices they use is collaborative learning which provides more opportunities for students and a supportive learning environment (Teague et al., 2012). Other instructional practices are based on guided experiences designed to promote a specific academic outcome and allow student to activate their prior knowledge while they participate in student centered activities (Bruce-Davis et al., 2014). Another instructional practice is the use of technology in the classroom to provide learning experiences that promote both independent and collaborative learning (Liu, 2013). Teachers can incorporate the use of technology in the classroom to monitor the academic achievement and progress of the students. Constructivism is a student-centered instructional practice where students have the opportunity to learn the skills needed by using their prior knowledge or the prior knowledge of peers to construct a meaning for what they are learning (Smeaton & Waters, 2013).

The implementation of Bloom's taxonomy on instructional practices provides an opportunity to challenge students by developing higher order thinking skills (Bruce-Davis et al.,

2014). Bloom's taxonomy is a pivotal piece of the instructional practices used by educators that conform to the mandates of the CCSS because the focus is on building meaning from life experiences and not choosing predetermined answers. One of the advantages of the Bloom's taxonomy as an instructional practice is that it provides options for differentiated instruction for diverse learners. It also helps the students develop different cognitive skills, strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Adams, 2015). Another instructional practice that teachers may incorporate in their lessons is the use of Multiple Intelligences created by Garner (1999). These intelligences include intrapersonal, interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, and naturalistic. These intelligences offered a way to focus on how students learn and develop skills based on their life experiences (Ghamrawi, 2014). Teachers may use a combination of different instructional practices to promote critical thinking and differentiation to accommodate different learning styles. The goal is for teachers to incorporate these instructional practices to the mandates of the CCSS.

Marzano et al. (2001) identified nine categories of instructional strategies during their research analysis that can increase student learning: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, promoting effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, establishing objectives and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and graphic organizers. It has not been established which specific instructional strategies used by teachers fosters the most academic achievement (Kane et al., 2010). Wenglinsky (2001) conducted a study about student achievement and instructional practices. He hypothesized that there are three aspects in teacher quality: instructional practices, professional development taken to foster these practices, and educational attainment. The results of his study showed that the instructional practices have the

most effect on academic achievement as well as the specific topics of professional development. The other important aspect of instructional practices and academic standards is testing.

Academic standards are established with the intent to determine high expectations for academic achievement as well as specific outcomes for students. Even when teachers may feel positive towards the content of the academic standards, a big number of teachers state that testing can lead them to teach in opposite ways of their best practices (Abrams et al., 2003). Abrams et al. (2003) conducted research on teachers' perceptions on state testing and found that: (a) state testing have a big impact on instructional practices in terms of content, (b) pressure is added to the teacher to prepare the students for the state test, (c) there is a big impact on student and teacher motivation and morale, and (d) impacts accountability.

There are barriers that may prevent teachers to be successful at implementing change or be resistant to it. Thornburg and Mungai (2011) conducted a study for over six years collecting data from 42 elementary and secondary teachers' experiences and opinions regarding a school reform initiative for special needs students in the state of New York. After analyzing the data, they found that teachers were resistant to making changes in their practices to implement new reforms because of lack of time to learn the content of the new reform, lack of support from leadership, and concern about meeting the academic needs of their students. The findings also revealed that veteran teachers were more resistant to changes in their practices than newer teachers and that the resistance was also due to the feelings that their experiences were not being valued or included in the decision-making process. Thornburg and Mungai (2011) focused their research on demonstrating the value of understanding teachers' experiences and perceptions in order to have clarity on why initial changes to instructional practices fail or succeed. Another case study conducted by Kaniuka (2012), focused on 8 teachers who had to make changes to

their instructional practices to accommodate a new reading program. After analyzing the data, Kaniuka (2012) found that the more competent teachers felt about the new curriculum the more they accepted the changes and ultimately implemented the new curriculum effectively. The findings also supported the idea that having a clear understanding of teachers' experiences and perceptions helps school administrators to better understand how to implement new reforms.

Understanding the nature and purpose of the change is even more important when organizations enter an unknown territory, such as the CCSS (Lopez, 2015). Another change brought about by the standards is the focus on digging deeper to achieve a better understanding of the content (Maloch & Bommer, 2013). The mandates and the rigor of the CCSS require significant changes in the teachers' instructional practices (Burks et al., 2015). In order for the change to be effective it needs to be linear in that it takes place downwards and authoritative succession of participants (Vandeyar, 2017). Teachers react to the changes that come from the implementation of the CCSS as an educational reform that comes from policymakers, school districts, and school administrators. Fullan (2001) claims that in order for educational changes to be effective there are three dimensions that need to be present: (a) new instructional resources and materials including technology and curriculum; (b) new instructional practices; and (c) a change in beliefs in the assumptions and theories underlying the educational reforms. The CCSS explicitly provides all the skills that students are expected to know and master; however, it does not provide instruction for teachers on how to roll them out to the students (Kamil, 2016). The CCSS also requires teachers to drastically increase the text complexity and add disciplinary literacy standards (Kamil, 2016). This increase in rigor and shifts in curriculum and instruction implies that teachers must adapt to the demands of CCSS by making changes to their instructional practices (Nadelson & Jones, 2016).

### ***Transition***

Transition is the “inner psychological process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the new situation that the change brings out” (Bridges, 1991, p. 2). The starting point of the transition process in the change is not the end result or outcome but “the endings that people have in leaving the old situation behind” (Bridges, 1991, p. 2). Teachers go through a similar process as they transition to the implementation of new academic standards, such as the CCSS. How teachers experience the transition to the CCSS will have a great impact on the success of their implementation. Martinie et al. (2016) reported that teachers have different voices that represent their transition to the CCSS. In a study of high school mathematics teachers, they found that there were four voices that represented teachers’ views on their transition to the CCSS for mathematics: hardcore adopter, anxious adopter, cautious adopter, and critical adopter (Martinie et al., 2016). The hardcore adopter represents the teachers that truly believe in the value of the standards and its content and, thus, are strongly motivated to roll out the standards as stipulated by the policymakers. The anxious adopter represents the teacher that obey the mandates because it is what they learned, however, they feel anxious about redoing work, such as lesson plans to be in compliance with the standards. The cautious adopter are the teachers that like to give the benefit of the doubt to the change, even though it has not been proven to be effective and question the value of the CCSS. The critical adopter are the ones that show reservation towards the alleged benefits of the standards and may believe it is just another change they have to endure to put the policymakers at peace (Martinie et al., 2016). Regardless of the subject, discipline, or grade being taught, teachers will undoubtedly undergo a transition process as they adapt their instructional practices to the changes brought about by the CCSS.

The success of the transition will depend on many factors, such as motivation, self-efficacy, level of preparedness, and support from school administration (Liou et al., 2016).

### **Teachers' Views of the Common Core State Standards Implementation**

The implementation of the CCSS have been entangled in controversy since its inception for many reasons. The need to continue to research this educational change is of pivotal importance, especially from the perspectives of the teachers that have been the main target of the change (Matlock et al., 2016). The teachers' views or perceptions may vary on factors such as, level of preparedness to implement the standards, confidence, familiarity with the standards, years of experience, grade level being taught, and geographic setting (Hall et al., 2015). The CCSS present a significant shift in the ways in which teachers deliver instruction. Because part of the educational reform is to make teachers accountable for the academic success of their students, the shift also needs to include the ways in which teachers assess students, which influences teachers' perception of the CCSS (Ajayi, 2016). In a study conducted about teachers' perception on the CCSS in writing, the findings presented both negative and positive perceptions (Hall et al., 2015). Teachers' perceptions of the increased rigor in the writing standards and the high level of expectations were positive, while their perception of instructional time, appropriate resources, and background knowledge from students were negative (Hall et al., 2015). Teachers' views and perceptions on their preparedness to teach English Language Arts (ELA) is an important factor that influences their instructional practices. Teachers need to feel confident with their level of content knowledge, skills to implement effective instructional practices, and have access to materials and resources that are in alignment with the standards (Ajayi, 2016). In a study conducted with high school teachers teaching English language arts (Ajayi, 2016), the findings indicated that the teachers perceived that they were not fully prepared to implement the

English language arts standards and that they needed ongoing professional development and resources aligned with the standards.

The question whether the CCSS are working effectively or being implemented effectively is the focus of research attempting to reach an answer that satisfies school administrators, teachers, law makers, and other school stakeholders. Hodge, Salloum, and Benko (2016) and Supovitz, Fink, and Newman (2016) focused their research on finding ways in which networking assist teachers in the implementation of the CCSS. Although they found that teachers were likely to go outside the school for additional knowledge on the standards and that coaches and school administrators were an important part of the teachers' social network, they were not able to determine whether the CCSS working. Herman et al (2016) found that teachers' views on the implementation of interventions based on the CCSS had an impact on their instructional strategies. However, even with instructional practices in alignment with the CCSS, they found no guarantee that academic growth of the students as measured by state testing would take place. Teachers viewed this as a challenge in their support for the academic standards. Herman et al (2016) found that there is an ongoing need for implementation research.

Another challenge that teachers perceive is schools' lack of funding to support the professional development and other resources needed for the effective implementation of the CCSS (Kober & Rentner, 2012). Teachers' perceptions and views about the CCSS also depends on their level of engagement in the process of the implementation (Matlock et al., 2016). Teachers that are highly engaged in the implementation of the standards and teach lower grades have better views of the CCSS, whereas teachers in higher grades seem to have different views of the CCSS (Matlock et al., 2016). Years of experience is also a factor on how teachers perceive the CCSS. Teachers that are early in their careers seem to have a positive outlook towards the

implementation of new standards compared to their veteran peers (Joyce, 1983; Matlock et al., 2016). There are many factors that determine teachers' perception of the CCSS and its implementation in the classroom. What is evident is that most teachers want to use their best instructional practices and implement whatever academic standards are in place to ensure that the students achieve academic success, regardless of their perception of the CCSS.

### **Summary**

The movement of the full implementation of the CCSS started on 2010 (Goldsteing, 2019). The purpose of the new standards was to provide a consistent and equitable set of skills for all students to increase their level of academic achievement so they can be successful in college or in the work force and be at the same academic level of students in other nations (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2013). Although well intended, the main problem that the CCSS implementation brought was that the standards did not specify how the teachers were to roll out these standards in the classroom to enable students to master the skills. The mandates of the standards were very specific as far as the level of rigor and complexity the instruction demanded. The standards were also vertically developed where each grade level built upon the other. However, there is no specific instructions as far as instructional practices, resources, or training, that teachers must use in order to implement the new standards in the classroom successfully. What is known is that there are vast amounts of research on how the standards were developed, their goal and intent, and their significance in student academic achievement (Jones & King, 2012; Martinie et al., 2016). There is also research on their level of success, or lack thereof, depending upon the high-stake assessments scores at state level (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Spillane, 2004). The research on teachers' perception shows that on-going research-based professional development, resources aligned with the standards, collaboration

with colleagues and support from their administrators are pivotal parts of the success of the implementation of the standards (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Research also provides information that shows that teachers have reported lack of support from school administration, understanding of the standards, lack of training, and lack of time to collaborate with colleagues and plan lessons according to the new standards (Adams & Miller, 2015; Rotham, 2012). Literature also shows that the mandates of the new standards call for shifts in thinking and planning when it comes to instructional practices (Nadelson & Jones, 2016). There is a transition process that teachers must undergo from the implementation of the previous academic standards to the new ones. What is not known are the specific steps that teachers have to take in order to make the specific changes to their instructional practices as they transition to the implementation of the CCSS to ensure optimal learning, quality instruction, and alignment with the standards. This study will address this issue by providing information from the teachers' lived experiences during this transition. This study has significant theoretical and practical value. The significance of the study is that it will provide information to school administrators, policymakers, and other teachers about the experiences that teachers have regarding their transition process to the implementation of the CCSS and the direct impact on their daily instructional practices when delivering instruction. This type of research can help to clarify the purposes, processes and priorities when introducing changes in the classroom and in the instructional practices, as well as to improve the understanding of professional and policy context will enable educators and school administrators to teach and lead more effectively and strategically. This study will add valuable information to the literature that can be used to promote the importance of in-depth professional development and high-quality training for teachers that undergo any type of significant change originated by educational reforms.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study is to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation to the CCSS. This study is qualitative using the transcendental phenomenology method. The research questions that guided the study were based on Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. The study took place at a public elementary school in the Central Florida area that have an accurate representation on the diversity present in the public school district. The participants for the study were public school teachers from grades K-5 with a minimum of eight years of experience since Florida officially adopted the CCSS on the 2014-2015 school year. The participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling. Participants were selected purposively because they understand and have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Snowball sampling involves the researcher asking participants to recommend other participants for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015).

The procedures for the study are clearly explained along with the data collection process. My role as researcher is thoroughly explained. The study was based on the axiological philosophical assumption. Under this assumption researchers make their values known in the study in relation to the context by "positioning themselves" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.21). I applied this to the study by providing my position of the phenomenon early in the study. There were three methods of data collection: interviews, focus group, and document analysis. The data analysis procedure that was used for this study was the Moustakas' (1994) modification of the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data. This chapter provides all the

appendices that were required during the study. The criteria to establish trustworthiness is addressed as well as the ethical considerations for the study. The chapter ends with a summary providing a strong conclusion of the information provided.

### **Design**

The research type selected for this study is qualitative. A qualitative method is a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning where each person has its own reality (Creswell, 2014). This study is qualitative because it is characterized by the use of natural setting, the researcher is a key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive and deductive data analysis, reflexivity, and holistic account. These characteristics were the driving force behind my decision in the selection of method of study. A quantitative research method would not have been appropriate for this study because quantitative research is characterized by examining the relationship among variables to test a theory. The variables in quantitative research can be measured so data in the form of numbers can be analyzed using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2014). This study did not yield numerical data. The experiences reported by teachers were analyzed and interpreted to obtain the essence and meaning of the phenomenon.

The design of the study is phenomenology. The goal and purpose of phenomenological research is to reach the essence of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon while defining the phenomenon (Cilesiz, 2010). In this study, participants were asked to share their perceptions and views about the benefits and challenges they have encountered while incorporating or making adaptations to their instructional practices as they transition to the implementation of the CCSS. The origins of the phenomenology design go back to Hegel where he described it as "a conscious knowledge associated with saying what is perceived, sensed, and

known from the persons' experience" (Yuksel & Yildirim, p.2, 2015). Phenomenology encompasses various philosophies including existential, transcendental, and hermeneutic theories (Cilesiz, 2010).

The type of phenomenological design used for this study is transcendental phenomenology. Husserl (1859-1938) was the founder of transcendental phenomenology. According to Husserl, individuals should reflect on a lived experience of a phenomena, as this way would capture the way in which an individual experiences the world around him/her and how to interpret the reality (Merriam, 2014). Husserl felt that the world and human consciousness were one and could not be studied in isolation (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl presented two concepts to be detrimental in transcendental phenomenology: intentionality and essences (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality refers to the researcher's conscious intent to study a phenomenon. Each experience consists of a noema and noesis. Eddles-Hirsch (2015) describes them as "the noema represents the objective experience of the phenomena, whereas the noesis represents the subjective experience" (p. 252). Both, the noema and the noesis have to be considered in order to have a clear understanding of the experiences described by the participants. The true essence of the phenomenon is discovered by the meanings of the experiences (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). During this study, teachers reflected on their instructional practices and sharing their experiences as to how they have encountered both challenges and benefits as they transitioned to the CCSS. The research questions used will elicited their lived experiences on the phenomenon as well as ways to make adaptations to their instructional practices using Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles as a guide.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this study were based on Bridges' transition model and Knowles' adult learning theory. The three stages of Bridges' model are based on endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges & Bridges, 2009). Knowles' adult learning theory is based on the need for adults to be involved in the process of change using their experience as a learning tool. The adult theory also explains why adults are more interested in learning something that has an effect on their job or their lives (Knowles, 1984).

### ***Central Question:***

What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers with changes and adaptations to instructional practices in the transition to the implementation of the CCSS?

### ***Sub-Question 1:***

What type of feelings have elementary school teachers experienced when faced with the end of previous academic standards to the CCSS?

### ***Sub-Question 2:***

What learning processes have elementary school teachers experienced in their preparation to transition to the CCSS curriculum?

### ***Sub-Question 3:***

What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers when they accept and adopt the changes in academic standards brought about by the CCSS?

## **Setting**

This study took place at an elementary public school in the Central Florida area. The selected school will be referred to as "Sunshine Elementary School" as a pseudonym. This school in this particular area was selected because they have an accurate representation of the

diversity present in the public school district. The selected school serve students from kindergarten to fifth grade. The demographics for Sunshine Elementary School, is as follows: 629 students, 46% are Hispanic, 30% are White, 13% are Black, 7% are Asian, and 3% are students of two or more races. There are 47% females and 53% males. The student-teacher ratio is 15:1. There is one school counselor for all students, one school principal and one assistant principal. The percentage of teachers with three or more years of experience is 71%. The percentage of low-income families is 68% (OCPS, 2020). For purposes of the study the focus will be on elementary grades K-5.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were public school elementary teachers from grades K-5 with a minimum of eight years of experience teaching since Florida adopted the CCSS in the 2014-15 school year. The participants were a homogenous group that have had significant and meaningful experiences on the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all the participants. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were the two types of sampling methods that were intended to be used to select participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling, and it was adequate for this study because it involved the researcher selecting participants based on the characteristics of the population and the objective of the study (Ames et al., 2019). I selected participants purposively because the design of the study called for participants that have experienced the phenomenon being studied. The other type of sampling that I intended to use was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling would require me to ask participants to recommend other participants for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). The participants had to be teachers that work in elementary public schools located within the Central Florida area. Participants were provided with a consent form for their

voluntary participation in the study (Appendix C).

### **Procedures**

The first step that I took before the research began was to seek the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Liberty University (Appendix A). I then secured approval from the site where the study was conducted (Appendix B). Getting approval from the desired site entailed filling out a form that the school district provides to conduct research. In this consent form I explained the purpose for the research. I emailed the administrators of the school I was seeking to use as the research site, presented to them the purpose of my research, my site letter of approval from the district, and requested their permission to contact the teachers. I asked the school administrators to provide a list of school emails for the teachers in order to contact them and ask for their participation. I began working on the purposive sampling process as I receive responses from teachers who volunteer to participate. Qualitative studies normally require a smaller sample size than quantitative studies. For qualitative studies the sample sizes should be large enough to obtain enough data to effectively describe the phenomenon being studies and answer the research questions. If finding an appropriate number of participants becomes an issue, then I would have used snowball sampling to acquire more participants. The goal is to obtain at least 12 participants. Because I was able to select the appropriate number of participants needed for the study, I did not have to use the snowball sampling to acquire more participants. I provided a consent form (Appendix C) to participants who agreed to participate in the interviews, focus groups, and document analysis assuring them that their participation was voluntary and that I was going to use pseudonyms to protect their identity. Once I selected all the participants, I scheduled the interviews and focus groups at the school site at the convenience of the participants. These meetings took place during their planning periods or before or after

school. I joined them wherever they met to plan or discuss their lessons. I was planning on joining them virtually if needed due to the school restrictions during the pandemic, however, there was no need because at the time of data collection most of the school restrictions were lifted. I ensured that participants received full disclosure of the purpose and goal of the study. The questions that I used during the interviews and focus groups elicited the participants' lived experiences on the phenomenon that was the focus of the study. Participants shared their lived experiences about the changes and adaptations they have had to make to their instructional practices as they transitioned to the adopted CCSS. The research questions that guided the discussions addressed these experiences. The research questions were based on Bridges' transitional theory and Knowles' adult learning theory. The data that collected was from the interviews, the focus groups, and document analysis. The data that collected is secured in a locked cabinet and in electronic files using a password for protection. I will keep the data collected for a period of three year, after which time I will discard it. The data analysis procedure that I used was the Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological data analysis procedure. I addressed the research questions once the data analysis was complete.

### **The Researcher's Role**

As the researcher, I ensured that the candidates qualify for the study before selecting participants. I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Prior to collecting any data, I solicited the approval of the site (See Appendix B) being used and the IRB approval from Liberty University (See Appendix A) to ensure that ethical guidelines are being reviewed and followed. My role as the researcher was to provide a clear explanation to the participants of what their role was in the study and the purpose for the research. There is no relationship of any type between any of the participants and me and therefore, I did not have any role of authority

over any of the participants. I was a facilitator that guided participants' discussions during the interviews and the focus groups providing research questions to elicit their lived experiences on the phenomenon being studied. Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) stated that "the researcher facilitates the flow of communication, identifies cues, and the participant sets respondents at ease" (p. 419). I shared with the participants my experiences about the phenomena with the intent to make the participants feel more comfortable sharing their lived experiences and develop an appropriate amity with the participants. My study is based on the axiological philosophical assumption (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Under this assumption researchers make their values known in the study in relation to the context by "positioning themselves" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.21). As the steward of this study, I ensured that I provided a safe environment for the participants as well as not expose them to unnecessary harm. My ethics were the underlying force driving the research process to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study. The last step was the composite summary of the general and unique themes captured during the data collection.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection methods for this study were based on interviews, two focus groups, and document analysis.

#### **Interviews**

For this qualitative study participants were selected using the purposive and snowballing sampling method. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method where the researcher selects participants based on the characteristics of the population and the objective of the study (Moustakas, 1994). I selected the participants purposively because they understand and have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Teachers were the only type

of participants for this study; therefore, I used my judgement to obtain a representative sample. After I selected the participants, I asked them to participate in semi-structured interviews where I used the research questions to elicit information about their lived experiences. The research questions were based on Bridges' transitional theory and Knowles' adult learning theory. I set specific times with the participants according to their work schedule and availability. I conducted a peer review of the interview and pilot the research questions using the same method of purposive sampling with three participants. Initially, due to COVID-19 the interviews were going to take place via Zoom, Skype or Teams. The interviewing process was going to depend on the digital platform the participants prefer or have access to. Because the school restrictions related to COVID-19 had been lifted by the time data was collected, there was no need to collect the data virtually, as initially planned. The data was collected face to face. I asked the participants to sign a consent for their voluntary participation in the study (Appendix C). The interviews took place at the school site at the convenience of the teachers. The time of the interview was between 60 to 90 minutes and was audio recorded. Each participant had one interview. The first few questions were basic straightforward and non-threatening questions to help develop rapport between the participants and me (Patton, 2015).

#### Open-Ended Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me about yourself. Where are you from and your current family situation?
2. Did you have a different profession before becoming a teacher?
3. Describe how your profession as a teacher has changed since you started up until now.
4. What is your worldview regarding education?
5. How would you place yourself in that worldview?
6. Describe your lesson planning process.

7. What type of curriculum do you use to guide your instruction?
8. What strategies do you use to incorporate the CCSS in your instructional practices?
9. What challenges or benefits have you encountered in your instructional practices due the implementation of the CCSS?
10. What changes need to be incorporated to the instructional practices to accommodate the rigor of the CCSS and improve quality of instruction?
11. How successful were those changes incorporated to the instructional practices on improving the quality of instruction? Explain.
12. What learning experiences have you been provided to be better prepared to implement the CCSS effectively?
13. Describe your experience of the steps taken from the ending of the previous academic standards to the new beginning where the implementation of the new standards began to take place.
14. Describe your experience in collaborating with peers to learn about the mandates of the CCSS and the steps taken to implement them in your instructional practices.
15. Describe experiences that have motivated you to be involved in these changes or adaptation to your instructional practices to improve instruction.
16. How have these experiences affected the way you deliver instruction at the present time?

Questions one through five are intended to be relatively straightforward and non-threatening and will ideally serve to help develop rapport between the participant and me (Patton, 2015). Questions six to eight are questions reflecting the knowledge that the participants have (Patton, 2015, p. 444). They are also the foundation for additional questioning. Questions nine to twelve focus on what participants have experienced and feel is important to the study

according to the responsive interview type of Rubin and Rubin (2012). The questions also provide an opportunity for the participants to delve into their experiences and elicit in-depth responses and details about their instructional practices, curriculum, lesson planning, and the incorporation of the CCSS in their instruction. Question thirteen makes a reference to the three stages of the Bridges' transitional model (Bridges, 1991). Questions fourteen to fifteen refer to the Knowles' adult theory where the elicited responses focus on the principles of adults being involved in the planning of their instruction (Knowles, 1980). Question sixteen served as an experience question to elicit information on what takes place in the classroom after making the adjustments or changes to the instructional practices to accommodate the CCSS.

### **Focus Groups**

The focus groups provided an opportunity for me to interact with multiple participants at the same time. Focus groups are a group of individuals that have some common experiences or characteristics that are brought together by a facilitator, who uses the interaction of the group to get information about a specific phenomenon being studied (Krueger, 1988). Krueger (1988) stated that there are three phases in conducting a focus group: conceptualization, interview, and analysis and reporting. Two focus groups for this study were comprised of a homogeneous group of six participants each from different grade levels. The goal was to have one session for each focus group. Each session was set between 60 to 90 minutes long. The sessions were audio recorded. The participants in the focus groups answered and discussed a set of questions regarding their lived experiences with transitioning to the CCSS (Appendix D). The data gathered from the focus groups provided information about the lived experiences on the phenomenon being studied, it provided insight into why certain views are held, and how they develop effective instructional strategies as a collaborative effort (Marczak & Sewell, 2007).

### Focus Groups Questions:

1. Describe your instructional practices prior to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
2. Describe your experiences in the process in planning a lesson in collaboration with peers.
3. What challenges and/or benefits have you experienced in your instructional practices in transitioning to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
4. What learning experiences have you been provided by school administration to be better equipped to implement the CCSS in your instructional practices and how have those learning experiences helped make the proper adaptations to your instructional practices to implement the CCSS?
5. What specific changes or adaptations have been made to your instructional practices to implement the CCSS?
6. Describe your experience with what motivated you to engage in the transition process to CCSS?

Question one provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their instructional practices prior to the implementation of the CCSS and compare their experiences with other colleagues.

The question help developed rapport between the participants and me (Patton, 2015). Question two is geared towards a discussion over the effectiveness of collaborating with peers in the lesson planning process as a powerful way to implement the CCSS (Hodge et al., 2016).

Questions three and five focused on the concepts of transition and change as described by the three stages of Bridges' (1991) transitional theory. Question four allowed for participants to share the extent to professional development and training as fundamental resources that they may have received from the school administration to prepare themselves to implement the CCSS in

their instructional practices effectively (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Professional development is an important piece to process and understand the significance and potential of the standards (Barrett-Tatum & Smith, 2017). Questions four and six related to the Knowles' adult learning theory where adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs that the process of learning will satisfy (Knowles, 1978).

### **Document Analysis**

The third form of data collection for this phenomenology study was document analysis. Bowen (2009) defined document analysis as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic material” (p. 28). The goal of the document analysis was to examine and interpret data to deduct meaning, increase understanding, and obtain empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). The documents that I collected were in the form of lesson plans designed and implemented by the participants for the different subjects they teach. The intent for collecting and analyzing lesson plans was to support or confirm the findings obtained through interviews and focus groups. Since the purpose of the study was to determine the changes that teachers have had to make to their instructional practices to implement new academic standards through their lived experiences, the lesson plans were an appropriate tool to see how teachers were implementing those changes in their lesson planning. Document analysis was also used as a means of triangulation in order to increase credibility to the study. Patton (1990) reported that triangulation helps to avoid bias by the researcher or results based on a single source.

### **Data Analysis**

I collected the data from come three sources: interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Methodological triangulation was used to ensure validity and credibility of the research

findings. This refers to the use of several data collection methods such as the ones used for this study (interviews, focus groups, and document analysis) (Hays & Singh, 2012). For the interviews, after I selected the participants, I asked them to participate in semi-structured interviews where I used the research questions to elicit information about their lived experiences. I set specific times with the participants according to their work schedule and availability. I asked the participants to sign a consent for their voluntary participation in the study (Appendix C). The interviews took place at the school site at the convenience of the teachers. The time of the interview was between 60 to 90 minutes and was audio recorded. Each participant had one interview. I conducted a member check of the interview questions to ensure that participants had an opportunity to review what they shared during the interview process, add or edit any information if they so desired. I went over all the questions and answers that the participants provided at the end of each interview.

For the focus groups, two focus groups for this study were comprised of a homogeneous group of six participants each from different grade levels. The goal was to have one session for each focus group. Each session was between 60 to 90 minutes long. The session was audio recorded. The participants in the focus groups answered and discussed a set of questions regarding their lived experiences with transitioning to the CCSS (Appendix D). The data gathered from the focus groups provided information about the lived experiences on the phenomenon being studied, it provided insight into why certain views are held, and how they develop effective instructional strategies as a collaborative effort (Marczak & Sewell, 2007).

The documents that I collected were in the form of lesson plans designed and implemented by the participants for the different subjects they teach. The intent for collecting and analyzing lesson plans was to support or confirm the findings obtained through interviews

and focus groups. Since the purpose of the study was to determine the changes that teachers have had to make to their instructional practices to implement new academic standards through their lived experiences, the lesson plans were an appropriate tool to see how teachers were implementing those changes in their lesson planning. Document analysis was also used as a means of triangulation in order to increase credibility to the study.

Before starting with the process of data analysis it was important to have a clear understanding of what the concept of analysis means. Coffey & Atkison (1996, p. 9) described analysis as “the systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships.” It is how data are transformed through the process of interpretation. The data analysis procedure that was used for this study was the Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological data analysis procedure, specifically the modification of the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data. The first step is known as horizontalization where preliminary grouping takes place. This step entailed listing every statement that was relevant to the experience of the phenomenon as provided by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The second step was reduction and elimination. Each expression needed to be tested for two requirements: the expression needs to contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it and determine if the expression can be labeled and abstract. The expressions that do not meet these criteria are eliminated as well as the ones that are repetitive and vague (Moustakas, 1994). The expressions that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). During the next step the clusters and themes of the invariant constituents began to emerge. All the experiences that are related were clustered into a thematic label. According to Moustakas (1994) “the clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience” (p. 121). Next, the invariant constituents and the themes were checked against all the information

provided by each participant. If the information provided is expressed explicitly or compatible, it is considered relevant to the participant's experience. If they are not explicit or compatible, the information should be deleted (Moustakas, 1994). In the next step, an individual textural description of the experience was constructed using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes. An individual textural description is an integration, descriptively, of the invariant textural constituents and themes of each participant (Moustakas, 1994). In order to find the themes, I bracketed my experiences and did the process of horizontalization, where every statement provided by each participant identified how they experienced the phenomenon. Verbatim examples are included from the interview. The next step was to construct an individual structural description of the experiences for each participant based on the individual textural description and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). This means that for each participant, the structural qualities and themes need to be integrated into an individual structural description (Moustakas, 1994). Then a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience needed to be constructed, including the invariant constituents and themes (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, using the individual textural-structural descriptions from each participant, a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences was developed representing the entire group (Moustakas, 1994). The goal was to determine if the final analysis of the data addressed the research questions.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research means the degree of confidence in data, its interpretation, and the methods that are used to ensure the quality of the research study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Yin (2018) stated that trustworthiness derives from data triangulation and keeping a trail of evidence. Having various sources of data helps the researcher obtain a broader scope of

perspectives, views, and attitudes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) founded the criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality. Credibility depends on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher. This concept has to do with the level of confidence the researcher has about the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was established in this study by data triangulation. The goal of data triangulation was to reduce systematic bias improving the validity of the study (Patton, 1999). Methodological triangulation was the method of data triangulation that utilized for this study. This involves using more than one option to gather data, such as interviews, focus groups, and document analysis (Denzin, 1978).

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Confirmability involves the researcher not allowing bias to skew the interpretation of what the participants have shared to fit a particular notion or narrative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I established confirmability by providing an audit trail of the steps taken to collect and analyze data, synthesize field notes and audio recordings. Dependability is the extent in which the study could be repeated by other researchers and obtain the same findings. I provided detailed information about how the research was conducted in a way that it can be replicated by other researchers. The method that I used to establish dependability was inquiry audit. Yin (2018) suggested that dependability increases when the procedural approaches are consistent throughout the study.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the possibility that what was found in one context is applicable to another context. This means that the research findings can be useful to participants in other settings where the reader can determine how the findings can be applicable to their specific situations (Polit & Beck, 2014). Transferability can be obtained by a detailed description of the research context and underlying assumptions (Trochim, 2006). I provided a specific and detailed description of the participants and sampling methods along with the data collection and analysis so the reader can decide if the findings can be transferred to another population. Lincoln & Guba (1985) stated that “it is, in summary, not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers” (p.316). The method used to establish transferability in the study is thick description which is a way in which I provided a detailed account of my experiences during the data collection process. This process entailed providing information about where and how the interviews, focus groups, and observations took place, and other aspects of data collection that help provide a clear understanding of the research setting.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To ensure compliance with ethical guidelines for this qualitative study I ensured integrity of the research. I sought informed consent from the participants and ensured to minimize the risk of harm as well as showed respect for their dignity. I informed the participants of the purpose of the research prior to the study. I protected their identity by using pseudonyms and ensuring that their participation was voluntary. Participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any given time. The data collected came from the interviews, focus groups, and observations. The data collected has been stored in a locked filing cabinet and in electronic files using a password for protection. Every participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality

and the data collected was coded according to the pseudonym. A pseudonym was assigned to the school where the teachers work at. Any type of communication regarding the research was done with transparency and honesty. Approval from IRB and the informed consent from participants ensured ethical consideration. Any type of information that can be misleading regarding data findings showing bias was avoided. Other types of ethical consideration included respecting the study site and minimize disruptions, respect participants' privacy, report findings honestly, and use language appropriate for audiences of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Summary**

The method I selected for this study was qualitative with a transcendental phenomenology design. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study was to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation to the CCSS. I selected participants using purposive sampling. The participants were comprised of a homogeneous group that have significant and meaningful experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). The data I collected came from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The data analysis method that I used is the Moustakas' phenomenological data analysis procedure (1994). The research questions that guided the study are based on Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. Each question was designed to elicit ideas from the participants as to the adaptations that they can make to their instructional practices to incorporate the mandates of the CCSS. My primary role as the researcher was to ensure that participants had a clear understanding of the purpose of the study, what their role is in the study, to protect them from harm, and to ensure that their participation is voluntary. My study was based on the axiological philosophical assumption. Under this

assumption researchers make their values known in the study in relation to the context by “positioning themselves” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.21). The criteria to establish trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability) are pivotal to the study and thoroughly explained in this chapter. Ethical considerations were ensured according to the IRB guidelines of Liberty University.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study was to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation to the CCSS. The research questions that guided the study were based on Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. The data analysis procedure that was used for this study was Moustakas' (1994) modification of the van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data. The participants for this study were 12 elementary school teachers from K-5 in the Central Florida area. The participants were selected using purposive sampling method. Initially, the intent was to have participants from two different public schools. However, because of all the restrictions that schools faced during the pandemic, the school district provided approval to conduct research for only one school. The data collection methods were semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis in the form of lesson plans (Bowen, 2009).

At the time data was collected, many restrictions had been lifted at schools and the interviews and focus groups were able to be conducted face to face instead of virtually, as it was initially planned. After carefully studying and analyzing all the statements gathered from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and lesson plans using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the van Kaam method of analysis, five themes emerged: changes to instructional practices, lesson planning, learning opportunities, challenges, and motivation. The participants were very candid about their experiences on this phenomenon. The themes that were elicited from the participants' statements related to and answered the central research question and sub-questions.

A narrative using participants' statements provided a rich description of the phenomenon being studied.

### **Participants**

Due to the nature of the phenomenon being studied, only public school elementary certified teachers from grades K-5 with a minimum of eight years of experience teaching in the state of Florida were selected. The participants were a homogenous group with significant and meaningful experiences on changes on instructional practices due to implementation of new academic standards, in this case the common core state standards. Initially, the intent was to have participants from two elementary schools be part of the study. However, because of the pandemic the school district made it very difficult to approve the settings for this study. Final approval was obtained for only one elementary school. There were many limitations in place for both school staff and students. During the time of the proposal for this research, many teachers and students were attending school virtually, thus the interviews and focus groups were initially intended to be virtually. However, by the time the research was conducted some of the restrictions had been lifted and all teachers were back teaching face to face. The interviews and focus groups were done face to face. The primary method of selecting participants was purposive sampling (Ames et al., 2019). This method was adequate for the study because it involved selecting participants based on the characteristics of the population and the objective of the study. For the purpose of this study, 12 participants were selected. One more participant was added to confirm thematic saturation. However, no new themes or codes emerged from the transcript, therefore, the data collection was complete using 12 participants. Snowball sampling was not needed due to the appropriate number of participants that volunteered for the study. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Member checking was done

with all participants after all the transcriptions were done. A description of all the participants, their pseudonyms, years of experience, grades taught, and their worldview on education follows.

### **Thomas**

Thomas has been an elementary public-school teacher for 15 years in the Central Florida area. He has taught second, fourth, and fifth grade. He was also a dean at another elementary school for a couple of years. He is currently teaching language arts in fifth grade. Teaching is the only profession he has had. Thomas feels that education was based on the need of the students when he first became a teacher, but now is based on test scores.

### **Ruth**

Ruth has been a teacher for 20 years. She has worked in two different school districts in Central Florida. She has been a math and science coach for both the district and schools. She is currently back in the classroom teaching 4<sup>th</sup> grade. She has only taught 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades. She has never held another job besides coaching or teaching. Ruth stated that education has changed a great deal in the last 20 years regarding methods and best practices. Her worldview on education is based on the notion that education is essential because it teaches not only academic content but also common sense and street smarts that are needed as well.

### **Abigail**

Abigail has been a teacher for 18 years. She has taught in 5 different states and 8 different schools. She has always taught intermediate grades for 17 of those 18 years. This is her first year teaching second grade. She has never had another profession besides teaching. Abigail feels that teaching has changed so much since she became a teacher that she is currently considering switching careers. When she started as a teacher, she had the autonomy to teach what she needed

to teach regardless of the academic standards. Now the focus is being micromanaged for everything.

### **Rebecca**

Rebecca has been teaching for the same school district for 24 years. Teaching is the only profession she has ever had. She feels that education has changed since she started teaching 24 years ago. Rebecca stated that she misses the autonomy she had to make her own decisions about what to teach her students and how. She allowed her students to make natural connections while making learning gains. Today teachers are expected to be cookie cutter teachers and are not allowed to use their best practices like long ago.

### **Dinah**

Dinah has 15 years in the education field. She has taught only elementary grades in different school settings. Dinah was a social worker before becoming a teacher. She stated that at the time when she began teaching the notion of teaching to the test was already in place, although teachers were not supposed to say that aloud. Instruction now is solely based on test scores and what needs to be taught to maintain or increase those scores. Subjects like social studies have taken a back seat and the focus is solely on reading and math. Dinah feels that every student has the capacity to learn under the right environment and resources.

### **Esther**

Esther has been teaching for 10 years in elementary schools. Her first 3 years she taught at a charter school. She has only taught 5<sup>th</sup> grade. This is the only profession she has ever had. Esther stated that even though she has not been teaching that long relative to other teachers, she can see how much education has changed over the years. She feels the micromanaging is getting

to a different level. She does not feel that she is trusted as a teacher. Her worldview on education is that education has turned out to be a business of numbers not so much about teaching students. She teaches what she is supposed to teach, but the pressure of tests scores is always present.

### **Anna**

Anna is an elementary school teacher who has been teaching for 18 years. Most of those years of teaching have been in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. However, she has taught 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade as well. She is currently teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Anna has never had another profession other than teaching. When Anna first started teaching, she was provided with the standards that needed to be taught and the freedom to figure out the best way to teach them. Now, she must follow structured CRM's and power points from the district along with tests and study guides and there is no deviation from those lessons. Anna's worldview on education is that teachers are a social scapegoat. She feels that we must teach and prepare students but when the child is not doing or performing well it is seen as being the teacher's responsibility. Parents take no accountability for their role in their child's education process.

### **Elizabeth**

Elizabeth is a veteran teacher with 26 years of experience as an elementary school teacher. Elizabeth has taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She is currently teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade and has not had a different profession other than teaching. Elizabeth feels that education is more structured now. Teachers have a clear understanding about what they need to teach. The lesson planning process is no longer a burden since it is provided for them. As far as her worldview on education, Elizabeth thinks there is too much testing, which takes over teaching. Since the academic standards are changing again, she is eager to see if doing away with testing will bring back teachers' creativity and less time constraints.

**Hannah**

Hannah has been a teacher for 29 years. The bulk of her experience is working with profoundly handicapped students. Hanna also taught pre-k for 10 years and then switched to kindergarten for another 15 years. She is currently working with students of all grades in primary, giving teachers support for students with academic needs. Teaching is the only profession that Hannah has had. When Hannah first started teaching there was no curriculum and no guidelines. Teachers at that time did what they thought students needed to learn to read and have basic math abilities. Hannah feels that her hands are tied as a teacher. She knows what students need and how to get them where they need to be but feels that she is not allowed to do so.

**Magdalena**

Magdalena started working on early childhood while she was going to college to become a teacher. She worked as a teacher in a pre-school for four years. She started working for the school district in 2003 and has been working as a teacher for the next 19 years. She started officially teaching third grade. She has only taught in primary grades. Currently she is teaching first grade. She has never had another job other than teaching. When she first started teaching 19 years ago the freedom was more on the teacher to decide how to teach the students and which resources to use. Data was part of the instruction but not the main piece. She shared that today everything is data driven. She feels that education is now only focused on numbers and funds.

**Eve**

Eve has been teaching for 20 years, 18 of those years have been working at the same school. She has taught every grade level from kindergarten to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She is currently teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. She has not had any other profession besides teaching. When she first started teaching,

she worked for a Title I school, which meant that she received a lot of nice resources and assistance in the classroom. Teachers were also given more freedom and flexibility to do what was best for the students. She feels that now everything is more structured and monitored. Eve feels that education has been structured to the point where it is based on numbers and school grades. Regardless of where education is at the present time, she considers herself an educator inside and outside the classroom.

### **Mary**

Mary has been working as a teacher for the same school district for 40 years. She has always been a kindergarten teacher. Mary shared that when she first started teaching all teachers would receive an outline of the skills that they needed to teach for the year. They were also given the freedom and flexibility on how to teach these skills. Mary feels that now she needs to teach a bunch of standards that do not help children in kindergarten read. She would like for the focus to be back on the basics and not the data. Her view on education is that if parents would parent their children more, then teachers would be able to teach the children more. In kindergarten the social time has been taken away to add more academics.

A description of the participants, their pseudonyms, and other relevant data follows.

Table 1

#### *Description of Participants*

Participant	Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Different Prior Profession	Current Grade
1	Thomas	15	No	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade
2	Ruth	20	No	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade
3	Abigail	18	No	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade
4	Rebecca	24	No	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade

5	Dinah	15	Yes	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade
6	Esther	10	No	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade
7	Anna	18	No	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade
8	Elizabeth	26	No	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade
9	Hannah	29	No	K to 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade
10	Magdalene	19	No	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade
11	Eve	20	No	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade
12	Mary	40	No	Kindergarten

### Results

This research study was conducted using a central research question and three sub-questions as a guide to describe the lived experiences of elementary school teachers that made changes and adaptations to their instructional practices during the transition of the implementation of the CCSS. Participants were part of one of the two focus groups conducted and individual semi-structured interviews where they shared their experiences of this phenomenon. The participants also provided a sample of a lesson plan that they have used to support their experiences in lesson planning and instructional practices. The themes that emerged as they shared their lived experiences are discussed in detail as they correlate with the sub-questions.

### Theme Development

The data analysis technique used for this study was Moustakas' (1994) phenomenology modification of the Van Kaam method. The same technique was used for all three types of data collection methods, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and lesson plans. The first step in the process was to set aside all my preconceived ideas and perceptions aside or bracketing

(Moustakas, 1994). This process took a lot of self-reflection of my experiences and best practices as an educator. From this step the process of horizontalization began. The transcripts for both interviews and focus groups were used to study in detail every statement that the participants made. Each statement was tested using the list of requirements that Moustakas' (1994) provides for the reduction, eliminations and then propose the invariant constituents. From these horizons or textural meanings, I developed the clusters of themes. Using the themes, I was able to develop the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon according to Moustakas' (1994) steps for this technique. A composite textural description of the phenomenon for all participants was developed. In this step, a narrative was used to explain the perceptions that each participant presented about the phenomenon. The next step was the construction of the structural descriptions based on imaginative variation. This entire process of data analysis using Moustakas' phenomenology reduction technique was done connecting all the participants' responses to the research questions. A data analysis was conducted by the primary research, not a data analysis software.

Semi-structured interviews were the first method of data collection. Participants answered 16 questions during the semi-structured interviews. The intent of the first five questions was to develop rapport between the participants and me. Questions six to eight were used to reflect the knowledge that the participants had regarding the phenomenon and led the way for additional questioning. Questions nine to twelve were intended to elicit the lived experiences relevant to the study. Questions thirteen to fifteen refer to the theories in which the research questions are based on. After studying each statement from all the participants, the reduction process was complete, and the emergent themes became apparent. The five themes that emerged were the changes to instructional practices, lesson planning process, learning

opportunities, challenges, and motivation. By focusing on the themes, I was able to write a rich description of the phenomenon. A table with the emergent themes and participants statements from the semi-structured interviews follows.

Table 2

*Participants' Statements During Semi-Structured Interviews and Emergent Themes*

Participants	Changes to Instructional Practices	Lesson Planning Process	Learning Opportunities	Challenges	Motivation
Thomas	"I needed additional training on the standards."	"I use the backwards design."	"Some professional development at school level."	"The lack of familiarity with the new standards."	"The increase of rigor of the standards."
Ruth	"I had to spend less time on each skill in order to cover all the skills needed to cover."	"I use the backwards design."	"PD's and workshops."	"The students were not developmentally ready to understand the standards."	"I was motivated by my job. I wanted to be the best at it."
Abigail	"I had to understand the rigor of the standards."	"I use the backwards design."	"None"	"Standards are not developmentally appropriate for students."	"My motivation was changing grade level."
Rebecca	"I had to provide more time for students to absorb the information."	"I use what the district provides."	"I have observed other teachers, videos and trainings provided by the school."	"The challenge was to try to get the kids caught up when they are so far behind."	"Watching my kids be successful."
Dinah	"I had to add resources and activities that match the rigor of the standards."	"I use what the district mandates and provides."	"The very little training that I received was confusing and not	"Fully understanding the content of the standards and what they are calling for."	"Wanting to do the best for my students and wanting to keep my job."

			helpful at all.”		
Esther	“I had to make sure I understood what the standard was asking the students to do.”	“I use the power points and resources provided by the district.”	“I received several professional development sessions at the beginning.”	“We may be pushing students to do something they are not ready to process yet.”	“I wanted to do the best for my students. It was also part of my job. There were no choices.”
Anna	“I had to go deeper using graphic organizers and breaking questions apart.”	“I use the power points and lesson plans provided by the district.”	“I had a few trainings. I was provided with emails and websites to look for information.”	“The standards are not age appropriate.”	“My motivation was to give my students what they needed to succeed.”
Elizabeth	“I had to work longer hours to find the appropriate resources.”	“In our team we split up the subject areas for planning.”	“There were some trainings. There has not been any lately.”	“Create and find resources that align with the new standards.”	“I wanted to meet my supervisor’s expectations.”
Hannah	“Standards are too rigorous. There will be students that fall through the cracks even more so than before.”	“My lesson planning is based on standards being taught in the classroom. I do ESE students for all grades k-5.”	“I had PLC’s with my team and talked about what each standard meant.”	“The students are not ready for the complexity of the standards.”	“I had no choice.”
Magdalene	“I had to do more re-teaching and pull out more students in small groups.”	“I use what the district provides.”	“I remember having trainings on-line, but no hands-on training at all.”	“Students were not ready for the extra steps or the rigor of the standards.”	“I had to do it to survive.”
Eve	“Using more updated reading and math resources	“I use what the district provides based on the	“I was provided trainings once or twice a month	“Not all students are ready to handle and process the	“Keeping my job was my biggest motivator but also do the

	aligned to the standards. I also use chunking lessons.”	scope and sequence.”	when the standards first came out.”	rigor of the standards.”	right thing for my students’ academic success.”
Mary	“The biggest change was the depth in which we view a story.”	“I used the CRM’s, the curriculum from the district and supplemental materials.”	“We had trainings at the school level. We also visited other schools and had other schools visit use to get a clearer picture on how to implement best practices.”	“The biggest challenge has been the complexity of texts that is presented to the students and the veering away from using personal knowledge in writing.”	“My students motivate me.”

The second method of data collection for the study was two focus groups. The group of 12 participants was divided equally into two groups of six participants each. The participants answered six questions. The first question provided an opportunity for the participants to share their instructional practices prior to the implementation of the CCSS. The effectiveness of collaborating with peers and lesson planning process for the common core standards is the foundation of the second question. Questions three and five reflected on the transition and changes that the implementation of the common core state standards demanded. Question four focused on the learning experiences provided by the school to equip the teachers with the knowledge needed to implement the new standards properly. Question six was formulated to elicit responses on the participants’ motivation to learn the new standards. After studying each statement and following Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological reduction technique to analyze data, five themes emerged; changes to instructional practices, lesson planning process,

challenges, learning experiences, and motivation to learn the new standards. The themes that emerged from the focus groups were the same as the themes from the semi-structured interviews.

### **Changes to Instructional Practices**

The theme of changes to instructional practices emerged primarily from the responses to question five. Four of the six participants of the focus group 1 reported that their biggest change or adaptation in the classroom to accommodate the new standards was the time factor. “Ruth” (P2) reported that she “had to learn to spend less time on each skill in math to cover all the skills that are required for the year.” “Dinah” (P5) also referred to the time because of the strict schedule they need to follow. Other participants, like “Esther” (P6) and “Anna” (P7) also talk about time as a change because they need to “chunk lessons” or “break questions into separate parts” which extends the timing of the lessons. The participants for focus group 2 reported that some of the changes were based on more “differentiation” and “stopping often during the lesson to check for understanding.” The participants for this group at some point during their discussion to question five referred to the frustration of “hunting for appropriate resources”, and “adapting to the rigor of the standards.” “Hannah” (P9) shared that “most students were not prepared to process this, and teachers did not fully understand the new standards either.”

### **Lesson Planning Process**

The theme of lesson planning was elicited by question two. All participants for the focus group 1 spoke about their respective teams dividing the subject areas among the team members for lesson planning purposes. “Anna” (P7) explained how her team tackles the lesson planning process by dividing the subject areas. She also stated that “my team is very good about sharing ideas and being there for each other if any of us need help.” The participants shared the benefits of approaching lesson planning in this manner. “Dinah” (P5) shared that “I plan for reading but I

also meet with my team to go over the unit requirements and resources and I make sure that everybody has what they need.” The six participants of focus group 2 geared their answers to question two regarding lesson planning more on the emotional aspect of it. Participants described their lesson planning process using words such as “exhausting,” “pressure,” and “confused”. “Rebecca” (P4) said about her lesson planning that “Everybody was confused on what to do. There was a lot of negative emotions.”

### **Challenges**

Challenges was a theme that emerged from the statements that the participants provided as a response to question three. Participants for both focus groups described the theme of challenges using phrases such as “too rigorous,” “rigorous requirements,” “students are not ready for the rigor of the standards,” “complexity of the standards,” “too hard,” and “lack of resources that align with the standards.” They all reported that the rigor of the common core standards is too high for the students because a lot of them are not developmentally prepared to process them effectively.

### **Learning Experiences**

Learning experiences is a pivotal factor of the transition process for the implementation of new standards. This theme became apparent as the participants answered question four. Most of the participants for both focus groups reported that they were provided with some form of training or professional development to learn about the new CCSS. The majority of the participants expressed that the appropriateness or effectiveness of the learning experiences provided really depended on the school that they were working at the time the CCSS were first rolled out. One participant, “Abigail” (P3), shared with the group that “I did not get the learning opportunities that I needed or would have liked to have to learn these new standards.” Another

participant, “Dinah” (P5), reported to the group that “I was at a different school that did not understand the gist of the standards either. It was a stressful experience for all the teachers at that time.”

### **Motivation**

Motivation became an apparent theme that was often combined with different emotions. Responses to question six enabled this theme to emerge. Participants for both focus groups responded that their main motivation to engage in the transition process to the new standards was the success of their students. Statements such as “I want my students to be successful” were shared by most participants even though they were also referring to the rigor of the standards as a challenge. There were a few participants that also reported that in addition to wanting their students to be successful, keeping their job was also a motivating factor. “Esther” (P6) shared that “a job is a job. I did not have many choices.”

The third form of data collection for this study was document analysis in the form of lesson plans. Each participant provided a copy of a lesson plan that they used in their class. All participants reported that they use the lesson plans, power points, and resources provided by the school district. The purpose of collecting and analyzing lesson plans is to support or confirm the findings obtained during the interviews and focus groups. The lesson plans would be an appropriate tool to verify how and if the teachers are implementing the changes that the CCSS mandate in their lesson planning. This type of data collection was used to triangulate the data to increase the validity and credibility of the study. After carefully reading and analyzing all the lesson plans provided it was apparent that the format and the content of all the lesson plans were uniform according to the grade level and subject area. The lesson plans were in the form of power points for each lesson. The daily power point had a specific learning target, which

provided the specific skill being taught with the designated common core standard description, an agenda with all the resources needed for the lesson, and the explicit instruction needed to help the student learn and process the skill. The explicit instruction part provided several strategies depending on the grade level and skill being taught. Some of the strategies found in this section were teacher read aloud, close reading, student writes for short responses, and text dependent questions or “TDQ’s”. To ensure student collaboration the power points also provided Kagan strategies such as give one-get one, turn and talk, and pair-share. They also provided sections for class discussion opportunities. For primary grades the power points provided foundational skills. The lesson plans always ended with an exit slip or a check for understanding to wrap up the lesson. The lesson plans provided by the district for the teachers encompass all the components needed to ensure that the CCSS are being implemented with fidelity in the classroom. The issue that some of the participants shared is that the resources provided are not always aligned with the standards and that there is not always enough time to cover all the content in one lesson. The participants reported that when the CCSS first came out they were not provided with the lesson plans and resources as they currently are. The participants shared that for the lesson planning they divide the lessons by subject areas and each team member discerns the resources and shares everything with their team. Only one participant, “Hannah” (P9), is not provided lesson plans from the district. Because she is an ESE teacher, nothing is provided for her. She must develop and implement her own lesson plans. She bases her individual lesson plans on the standards that all her students (k-5) are working on in their respective classrooms based on their academic needs. This confirms and supports what the participants reported during the interviews and focus groups.

### **Research Questions Responses**

The research questions that were developed to guide this study were intended to elicit responses to support the purpose of the study. The central question and the sub-questions were designed based on Bridges' transition model and Knowles' adult learning theory. Bridges' transition model is based on three stages, endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges & Bridges, 2009). Knowles' adult learning theory explains why adults are interested in learning something that has an effect on their job or their lives (Knowles, 1984). Because of the nature of the phenomenon being studied, these theories were considered appropriate as a foundation to develop questions that would elicit the responses to support the purpose of the study.

**Central Question:** What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers with changes and adaptations to instructional practices in the transition to the implementation of the common core state standards? This question focuses on the processes that teachers went through to learn new academic standards and implement them effectively in their instructional practices. After analyzing all the statements provided it was evident that there were many similarities in the lived experiences shared by the participants. All 12 participants were eager to share their experiences. The themes that emerged from all the statements from both the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups were, changes to instructional practices, lesson planning, learning experiences, motivation, and challenges. The focus of the responses regarding changes and adaptations was mainly on negative emotions and challenges. Statements or phrases such as "frustration", "very little training", "too rigorous", "no autonomy", and "lack of appropriate resources" were common among the participants. Most of the participants worked at different schools at the time the CCSS were introduced to the teachers. Their lived experiences were a reflection of where they were working at the time. The majority of the participants reported that some of their challenges were that they had some training but that it was not enough to provide

them with a clear picture as to what those new standards entailed for both teachers and students. They also shared their frustration about the complexity of the standards and lack of appropriate resources. One of the participants, “Abigail” (P3) stated that she received no training at all at the school she was at. Some of the participants shared information about the challenges they had faced during the implementation of the new standards, but some shared some benefits.

“Rebecca” (P7), stated the because the standards are uniform, they take the guesswork out of it.

“Esther” (P6), shared that one of the benefits of the new standards was that “students are push to think outside the box.” The theme of lesson planning emerged from the statements that the participants shared during both interviews and focus groups. The participants reported that when the school districts first introduced the CCSS teachers were not provided with appropriate resources or lesson planning training to reflect the mandates of the CCSS. The participants were simply provided with some type of learning experiences, depending on where they worked at the time, and then they were asked to implement them in the classroom. Participants had to rely on their team members to learn as much as they could about the standards and plan accordingly.

“Elizabeth”, (P8) stated that “finding resources that aligned with the standards was difficult.”

Currently all the participants reported that they all use the lesson plans provided by the school district in the form of power points. The lesson plans that the participants provided supported and confirmed that the school district is now providing the lesson plans and resources needed to implement the standards appropriately in the classroom. Some participants like “Magdalene” (P10) and “Eve” (P11) shared that “the resources do not always align” and that “not all the students are ready for the complexity and rigor.” Motivation was another theme that emerged from the participants’ statements. Although most of the participants shared that their main motivation was to do the best they could for their students, some participants shared that they did

what they had to do to keep their jobs. “Abigail” (P3) stated that “she is considering switching careers.” “Magdalene” (P10) shared that she “feels like a robot and that she used to love to teach, now she just likes it.”

**Sub-Question 1:** What type of feelings have elementary school teachers experienced when faced with the end of the previous academic standards to the common core state standards? This question is based on Bridges’ transition model which entails three stages, endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges & Bridges, 2009). Teachers need to learn how to manage the loss of the old academic standards and understand why the change is necessary. After carefully analyzing the statements that the participants provided during the interviews and focus group questions, specifically interview question 13 and focus group questions 1, 3, and 5, it was apparent that the participants went through a process of trying to understand and accept the need for changing academic standards. Some participants felt that they lost the autonomy that they once had to make decisions on what to teach and how to teach it. Phrases shared by participants like “frustration,” (Abigail) “feeling overwhelmed,” (Elizabeth) “anxiety,” (Magdalene) “resentment,” (Dinah) “resistance,” (Dinah) “confusion,” (Rebecca) and “high stress levels”(Hannah) is how the participants described how they felt in the transition process from the end of the previous standards to the neutral zone where they felt unsure about how to roll out the new standards in the classroom. The participants shared that they embraced the changes they had to make and that they did the best they could at the time to provide to their students the best instructional practices to meet their needs. The themes of challenges and motivation were the foundation for this sub-question. The challenges they faced were evident as the participants reported their negative emotions towards engaging in the process of implementing new standards and their motivation to continue to do so.

**Sub-Question 2:** What learning processes have elementary school teachers experienced in their preparation to transition to the common core state standards curriculum? This question is based on the Knowles' adult learning theory which explains why adults are interested in learning something that has an effect on their jobs or lives (Knowles, 1984). Because of the statements that participants shared on this topic in both interviews and focus groups, the theme of learning experiences emerged. Out of 12 participants, only one participant reported that she did not receive any training at all for the new standards. The majority of the participants reported that they received some type of training for the new standards. Some had professional development at the school level, others were offered on-line workshops, and others were able to visit other schools to learn from them. The level and frequency of learning experiences that the participants received depended on where they worked at the time the CCSS were introduced. "Magdalene" (P10) reported that she had "trainings on-line but no hand-on experience." "Ruth" (P2) shared that she "worked at the district and had access to workshops, professional developments, and other trainings." "Esther" (P6) stated that she had "several professional developments but no one really knew or understood." Some participants also shared that they have not been provided with any type of training or professional development on the new standards recently. It is important to note that the CCSS were first implemented about 8 years ago and that this school year the primary grades have been introduced to another new set of academic standards called Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (B.E.S.T.) Beginning next school year K-5 will be implementing yet another set of new standards. This means that teachers will have to undergo a similar process before implementing the new academic standards. This is the point where the changes or adaptations should be made to the instructional practices to incorporate the new standards. This reflects the neutral zone of Bridges' transition theory (Bridges, 1991).

**Sub-Question 3:** What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers when they accept and adopt the changes in the academic standards brought by the CCSS? This question focuses on the last stage of Bridges’ transition theory which is new beginnings. During this stage teachers are developing new skills and making appropriate adaptations to their instructional practices as they transition to the CCSS. According to the theory, they may also be motivated and open to new ideas. After analyzing the data collected from the interviews and focus groups, the statements from all the participants showed that when it comes to the theme of motivation, they all want to do what is best for their students, but also their motivation is primarily focused on the fact that they need their jobs. Their acceptance comes from working collaboratively with their team members to plan their lessons and find the appropriate resources to match the standards and the need of their students. “Thomas” (P1) shared that “the increase in the rigor of the standards” was a motivating factor to learn the standards and adopt the necessary changes. “Elizabeth” (P8) reported that she wanted to “meet the supervisor’s expectations.” “Mary” (P12) shared that her “students were the biggest motivator to do what she needed to do.” “Abigail” (P3), on the other hand, reported that her motivating factor was “moving to a new grade.” Motivation was an evident theme that emerged from the statements that the participants shared regarding acceptance and adopting new instructional practices to accommodate new standards. A table with statement examples from participants supporting the research questions follows.

Table 3

*Statement Examples Supporting Research Questions*

Central Question Themes: Challenges Adaptations Lesson Planning	Sub-Question 1 Theme: Challenges	Sub-Question 2 Theme: Learning Opportunities	Sub-Question 3 Theme: Motivation

<p>Challenges:          “There was a lot of confusion, resentment, fear, pushback, and resistance.” P5          “Work longer hours because there was more work to be done when it came to finding resources.” P8          “Accommodate the rigor of the standards.” P12          P8</p> <p>Adaptations:          “I use Kagan strategies to enable students to collaborate with each other.” P10          “Teach in digestible bites.” P4          “I had to go more in depth with graphic organizers.” P7          “Use close reading of texts across content areas.” P12          “I had to differentiate more.” P10          “I had to chunk the lessons more and stop often during my lessons to check for understanding” P11</p>	<p>“Lack of familiarity with the new standards.” P1          “Students are not developmentally ready to understand them.” P2          “The standards are too hard for the students to process.” P6          “The standards were too rigorous and did not come with a set of instructions.” P5          “Students are not ready for the complexity of the standards.” P9          “Students are not ready for the extra step and the rigor.” P10          “My challenge was to try to get kids caught up when they are so far behind.” P4          “There was a lot of negativity and resistance.” P4</p>	<p>“Some professional development was offered at the time, but no one really understood the foundation of the standards.” P6          “The very little training that I got was confusing and not helpful at all.” P5          “We had some PLC’s and talked about what each standard meant.” P9          “I remember having a lot of trainings on-line, but no hands-on training at all.” P10          “I did not get the learning opportunities that I needed or that I would have liked to have to learn these new standards.” P3</p>	<p>“I was motivated by my job. I wanted to be the best at it.” P2          “I wanted to do the best for my students.” P6          “I wanted to do the best I could for my students. I also wanted to keep my job.” P5          “I had not choice because things needed to get done.” P9          “I did what I had to do to survive.” P10          “I needed the students to be successful since they are the ones being tested on the FSA according to these standards.” P7          “Keeping my job was my biggest motivator.” P11          “I wanted to meet my supervisor’s expectations do to what I was supposed to be doing.” P8</p>
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<p>Lesson Planning:          “I remember being exhausting. Everybody was confused on what to do.” P4          “The pressure was to make sure we had appropriate resources aligned to the standards.” P9          “We split the subject areas and each teacher plans for one subject.” P8          “I use the power points and lesson plans provided by the district.” P1          “I use the backwards design.” P3</p>			
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### Summary

After collecting the data from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and lesson plans from 12 participants using Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the van Kaam method of analysis, five themes emerged. The five themes were changes to instructional practices, lesson planning, learning experiences, challenges, and motivation. The core content of the themes was the foundation to answer the research questions. The central question focused on the processes that teachers went through to learn new academic standards and implement them effectively in their instructional practices. The statements collected from the participants showed that all of them had similar experiences in the phenomenon. Many negative emotions related to their experiences were shared. The first sub-question focused on the experiences that teachers had to endure to

manage the loss of the previous academic standards and understand why the change was necessary. Several participants share their “frustration”, “resentment” in their “of autonomy to make decisions regarding academics in their classroom”. Sub-question 2 referred to the learning experiences provided to the participants by the school district. Most of the participants reported that they had some form of training or professional development depending upon which school they worked at the time. Not all participants felt that the learning experiences provided were helpful. Sub-question 3 focuses on the last stage of Bridges’ transition theory, which is beginnings. The main theme was reflected on this question was motivation. All participants reported that they were motivated to see their students be academically successful. However, they also reported that keeping their job was a key factor. The acceptance to make changes and adapt their instructional practices also came from working collaboratively with their team members in their lesson planning process and finding appropriate resources that aligned with the new standards. The data collected provided enough information to answer the research questions that led this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenology study is to discover the experiences that elementary teachers have had regarding changes or adaptations to their instructional practices in the transition to the implementation to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In this chapter the summary of findings provides detailed information of the data analysis in relation to the research questions based on Bridges' transition theory and Knowles' adult learning theory. The central question along with the three sub-questions that guided this study were all answered providing specific information shared by the participants. The data collected was in the form of interviews, focus groups, and lesson plans where the participants shared their lived experiences regarding the phenomenon being studied. In the discussion section the findings of the study are discussed in detail in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature that was selected for this study. The findings of this study confirmed previous research, but it also added valuable information that could be beneficial for school administrators and school districts on how to approach transition processes and academic reforms. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this study are thoroughly addressed as well as some recommendations for policy makers, school administrators, school districts, and stakeholders. The specific delimitations and limitations of the study are presented in this chapter. Delimitations such as using only elementary school teachers with a minimum of eight years of experience and only one elementary school are explained in detail. Limitations like having only one male participant were also addressed. Based on the delimitations and limitations of the study recommendations for future research were also provided along with the specific types of designs for the study. The

chapter ends with a succinct summary with a focus on the most important “take-aways” from the results of the research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The data collected from 12 participants in the form of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and lesson plans were studied and analyzed using Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenology modification of the van Kaam method. The research questions that were designed for this study were intended to elicit responses to support the purpose of the study. The central question and the sub-questions were designed based on the Knowles’ adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980) and the Bridges’ transition model (Bridges, 1991).

**Central Question:** What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers with changes and adaptations to instructional practices in the transition to the implementation of the CCSS? The participants shared many similarities in their lived experiences regarding the phenomenon of the study. With the statements provided by all the participants five themes emerged, changes to instructional practices, lesson planning, learning experiences, motivation, and challenges. The responses provided regarding changes and adaptations to instructional practices presented mainly negative emotions and challenges. Phrases such as “frustration”, “pushback”, “no autonomy”, “lack of appropriate resources”, were common among the participants. The lived experiences that the participants shared reflected where they were working at the time the CCSS were introduced to the school system. The challenges reported by the participants included lack of understanding of the standards, lack of appropriate resources, no autonomy to make decisions about what to use and how to proceed, and the complexity of the standards. Even though most of the participants reported that they received some form of training, they expressed that it was not enough at the time to help roll out the standards in an

effective and knowledgeable way to the students. The theme of lesson planning process was elicited by the participants responses to the questions used for the semi-structured interviews. Most of the participants reported that they worked in a collaborative team, which helped them figure out to some extent how to plan their lessons. At the time, they had to do their own research and look for appropriate resources. Years later, the school district began to provide lesson plans, power points and resources aligned with the standards. All participants shared that although sometimes they deviate from parts of the lesson plans or the resources provided, for the most part that is what they have to use in their classroom, which leaves them with very little autonomy to make decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. Motivation was another theme that emerged from the participants' responses. Most of the participants reported that their main motivation to participate in the changes and adaptations to the new standards was to do the best for their students. They also reported that they were motivated to keep their jobs.

**Sub-Question 1:** What type of feelings have elementary school teachers experienced when faced with the end of the previous academic standards to the CCSS? The statements that the participants provided in response to this question showed evidence of “resistance”, “confusion”, “anxiety”, “high stress levels”, and “feeling overwhelmed.” It was apparent that the participants went through a process of trying to understand and accept the need for changing and adapting to new academic standards. During the transition process from the end of the previous standards to the neutral zone, according to Bridges' transition model, the participants felt unsure about how to proceed in the classroom with the new academic standards. The participants also shared that they eventually embraced the changes and adaptations they had to make in order to provide the best instruction for their students. The themes of challenges and motivation were the basis for this sub-question.

**Sub-Question 2:** What learning processes have elementary school teachers experienced in their preparation to transition to the CCSS curriculum? The theme of learning experiences emerged from the responses of all participants. Out of 12 participants only one participant reported that she did not get any training at all for the new standards. The rest of the participants shared that they received some type of training either in the form of professional development at the school level, on-line workshops, or visits to other schools. The quality and frequency of the learning opportunities that the participants received depended on where they worked at the time the new standards were introduced. Most of the participants reported that the learning opportunities they had introduced them to the standards but were not very helpful at the time because no one was knowledgeable enough about the new standards to effectively teach them.

**Sub-Question 3:** What are the lived experiences of elementary school teachers when they accept and adopt the changes in the academic standards brought by the CCSS? The last stage of Bridges' transition theory is new beginnings. This is the stage where teachers may be motivated and open to new ideas. New skills and appropriate adaptations or changes to instructional practices are put in place to accommodate the new standards. After analyzing the statements provided by the participants, the motivation is focused on doing the best for their students and keeping their jobs. The process of acceptance takes place from working in collaboration with peers that are experiencing the same phenomenon to develop effective lesson plans and find appropriate resources aligned with the new standards. The theme of motivation was evident from the statements that the participants shared regarding acceptance and adopting new instructional practices.

## Discussion

The findings of this study are thoroughly explained in relationship to the theoretical and empirical literature that was selected in Chapter Two.

### Study Findings in Relationship to Theoretical Literature

The study conducted was based on two theories: Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. The seminal work of these theorists, although different, correlated to the nature of the phenomenon of the study. Bridges' transitional theory (1991) was developed to help individuals and organizations during significant transitions that are part of a big change. The purpose of his methodology was to help members of management obtain understanding and purpose during time periods where organizations are undergoing significant transformations. Bridges (1991) explains the difference between change and transition, two key components of this study. Change refers to the external event or situation that is taking place. In this study, the change refers to what the teachers are presented with when they must learn and teach new academic standards and the adaptations that they have to make to accomplish this. Bridges (1991, p. 2) refers to transition as "the inner psychological process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the new situation that the change brings out." The transition model is comprised of three stages: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges, 1991). The findings of this study showed that the shared lived experiences from the participants reflected these stages. The participants described the negative emotions they felt when they were approached with the notion that the academic standards that they knew and were familiar with were no longer going to be utilized in the classroom anymore. None of the participants shared any positive emotions or even complacency at the beginning stage of the process of changing academic standards. When the teachers

understood that they had no choice and that they had to learn, understand, and roll out the new academic standards in the classroom, they dealt with a shift in their thinking, planning, and adapting new instructional practices. This was an ongoing process for all the participants. During this process, the teachers reported that they had some type of professional development or training on the new standards. The effectiveness and depth of the trainings and professional development depended on where they teachers were working at the time. Judging by their experiences and reports there was not a uniform or specific form of training for all the schools provided by the district. Different schools approached the new standards in different ways, not all of them effective. At least one participant reported that she never received any training to learn the CCSS. The participants reported some challenges during this process. They reported that they really did not understand what the new standards really entailed, they felt the rigor was too high for the students, and the resources that would align with the new standards were hard to find since the demands of the standards was so high. Working with collaborative teams was one aspect that helped the participants ease their concerns on how to roll out the standards effectively. The last stage of this model is the new beginnings. This is when the participants report accepting and beginning to adopt the change. Here is when teachers are developing new skills or making the appropriate adaptations to their instructional practices to the CCSS. Different motivating factors come into play during this stage. All the participants reported that their motivation was based on two factors: they wanted and needed to keep their jobs and they all wanted to do the best for the academic success of their students. According to the theory during this last stage teachers' experiences during this time should be more positive than the previous stages and more open to the transition process. This was not necessarily the case for this study. Because they felt that they did not have the necessary resources and the appropriate training to

learn the demands and requirements of the new standards, not all participants projected positive emotions during this stage. The participants' lived experiences shared that their focus became working on collaborative teams since all the teachers were going through the same process. This along with their motivation to do the best they could for their students enabled them to embrace the transition to the new standards.

The focus of Knowles' adult learning theory was on the development of educational assumptions that targeted the needs of adult students and incorporated their career and life experiences (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 2012; Lindeman, 1926). Knowles et al. (2015) proposed a process model where adult learners self-direct their learning by using a facilitator who provided necessary materials and resources to improve their understanding and processing of the content. Knowles' theory concept would enable school districts to meet the demands of new educational reforms, in this case the new CCSS, while teachers are allowed to have a voice and input on how this learning takes place. This theory presented an appropriate framework for this study, in the area of transitioning to the implementation of the new CCSS. The four principles of Knowles' theory are: (a) adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction, (b) their experience is the basis for the learning, (c) they are more interested in studying topics that have relevance and impact to their job or personal life, and (d) adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented. The findings of this study showed that the participants' lived experiences shared confirmed the need for these principles to be present in the process to have a successful transition. Even though teachers were not part of the decision-making process regarding the development and implementation of new academic standards, they had to be involved in the planning of their instruction as they are the ones imparting the classroom instruction. The challenge in this process as reported by the participants was that they

did not have a full understanding of the new standards and what they really entailed. The participants did understand the significance, rigor, and relevance of the new standards but they did not fully comprehend how to make the proper adaptations to make it happen, especially with those students who were not developmentally ready to process the complexity of the standards. Using their experience was pivotal during this process. The topic of new academic standards was very relevant to them and the process of learning and understanding them would have an immediate impact on their jobs and best practices. Their challenge was their learning was based on the problem of making appropriate adaptations to their instructional practices and implementing the new CCSS.

### **Study Findings in Relationship to Empirical Literature**

The related literature that was found on this topic focused on teachers' preparedness to implement the new academic standards, their effectiveness in delivering instruction, changes to instructional practices, and their views on the implementation of the CCSS. Looking at the teachers' lived experiences and perspectives on the topic and their reported preparedness to learn, understand, and implement the new academic standards was essential to fill the gap in the literature. The literature shows vast amounts of information on the purpose and intent of the CCSS, but the standards did not come with a set of instructions for teachers on how to roll them out to their students. There is also a lack of empirical evidence on teachers' level of preparedness and how it affects their instructional practices. The data collected from the participants of this study showed that none of them felt really prepared to roll out these new standards. Their professional development was not very in-depth, uniform, or effective enough to feel confident about teaching the new standards. The participants described this process with negative connotations. The research conducted by Darling-Hammond (2017) on professional development

showed a consensus about the main principles in the design of learning activities and experiences that have an impact on teachers' instructional practices and knowledge. For professional development to be effective it must have a rigorous content focus, active learning, and collaboration, and be in alignment with the curriculum. The participants in the current study reported that they needed these components in the professional development that they received during the process of learning about the CCSS, but they did not always get that. They all shared the importance of team collaboration and that at some point that was got them through the process because they were all going through the same emotions and challenges. Teacher collaboration or networking is another way to implement the CCSS effectively (Hodge et al., 2016). Finding the proper amount of time to collaborate and plan was a challenge that the participants reported during the study. Alignment with the curriculum was another challenge that the participants shared as well. The rigor and the complexity of the standards called for resources that they did not have and were not provided for. They shared their knowledge, tried their best to plan together and search for appropriate resources to deliver instruction. The experiences that teachers share, prior content knowledge, and proper curriculum will affect how they respond to professional development (Dingle et al., 2011).

For teachers to be in compliance with the demands of the CCSS, they must make a shift in their thinking, lesson planning, and instructional practices. The rigor and complexity of the standards propose a challenge for teachers because their focus needs to be on testing strategies and content. The implementation of new academic standards also comes with new testing. This makes it difficult for teachers to make changes to their instructional practices to accomplish this goal. One of the concerns that the participants of the study reported was the lack of autonomy to make appropriate decisions regarding instructional practices and putting in the back burner other

subjects like science and social studies. Because these subjects are not tested in the lower grades, the push is to focus on reading and math. Kaniuka (2012) found in his research that the more competent teachers felt about new curriculum the more they accepted the changes and were willing to implement the new curriculum effectively. The participants of this study reported currently feeling competent about implementing the CCSS in the classroom. However, the CCSS were adopted in the state of Florida in 2014-15 school year, which means that they have had years of experience in the learning, understanding, and implementing of the standards. This is not how they felt at the beginning. The success of this transition process depended on many factors, such as motivation, self-efficacy, level of preparedness, and support from school administration.

Previous studies show that teachers' perceptions on the CCSS could be both negative and positive. In a study conducted on teachers' perceptions of the increased rigor in the writing standards and high expectations were positive, while their perceptions of appropriate resources, instructional time, and background knowledge from students were negative (Hall et al., 2015). Although most of the participants of current study felt that higher order thinking skills that the new standards required was a positive, they also felt that the complexity and the rigor was too high for most of their students. Many of the participants shared that the students were not developmentally prepared to understand and process the standards. The changes they shared in their instructional practices were primarily on differentiated instruction, close reading strategies, and chunking lessons to determine student understanding. Matlock et al (2016) showed in their research that teachers that are highly engaged in the implementation of the standards and teach lower grades have better views of the CCSS, whereas teachers in higher grades seem to have different views of the CCSS. Although the current study only included teachers of lower grades,

their data did not show positive views of the CCSS. Most of the data showed complacency and accountability after years of implementing the standards but not necessarily positive views. This study corroborates some aspects of previous research, but it also provides other perspectives. Something unique about this study is that the participants referred to the CCSS as a present problem not just the past. Even though they have been teaching to the CCSS since 2014, their focus is still mainly on negative emotions and time management, not on specific strategies to implement the standards. This is an important detail that would be very useful for school administrators and school districts because this year Governor of Florida, DeSantis implemented the use of yet, another set of new academic standards called Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking or B.E.S.T. The new standards are already in place for primary grades. Next year they will be implemented in the intermediate grades. Some of the participants that are teaching primary grades are already using the new academic standards and feel the process or transition is very similar. This study presents an opportunity for school administrators and school districts to assimilate the perspectives and lived experiences of teachers in a different light other than the one found in the literature to facilitate and improve the systems they have in place when implementing new academic standards or any new school reform.

### **Implications**

After analyzing the data collected from the current research the findings that emerged revealed some theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. The implications along with some recommendations for policymakers, school districts, school administrators, and stakeholders are discussed in the following section.

#### **Theoretical Implications**

The two theories that guided this study were the Bridges' transitional theory developed by William Bridges and the adult learning theory by Malcolm Knowles. Bridges' transition model entailed three phases: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges, 1991). The lived experiences that the participants shared during the study regarding the changes and adaptations to their instructional practices to accommodate the CCSS revealed that all of them had indeed gone through this transition process as described by Bridges' transition theory. When participants described their experiences when the previous academic standards were no longer in effect, they referred to the process as "confusing" and "overwhelming". They shared their experiences on how they had to shift their thinking and their planning. The participants shared their difficulties in understanding and processing the new academic standards and how they would impact their instructional practices. Making connections with the appropriate resources and the new standards and how to present them effectively to the students was a challenge. This is the core of the change process as described by the theory. The learning experiences that the participants were provided along with the collaboration with their peers allowed the acceptance and the adoption of the change.

The adult learning theory by Knowles (1978) focuses on the learning strengths and styles of adult learners. Participants shared that during the transition process of adopting the new academic standards even though they described the process as "confusing" and "overwhelming", they were motivated to be involved in the process and planning of implementing the new academic standards by their desire to do the best they could to enable their students to reach their academic goals and by their need to keep their jobs as teachers. The lived experiences shared revealed that the participants' interest in studying and understanding the new standards had a strong immediate impact in their jobs and how they viewed the importance of working in a

collaborative team. Participants also tackled the challenge by focusing on solving the issue of changing instructional practices to accommodate new academic standards. The findings of this study revealed that the learning process that participants went through reflect the principles of this theory.

Understanding the purpose of this study's findings may be of pivotal importance for school administrators, teachers, coaches, and stakeholders. Understanding the process of changes or transitions may be a helpful tool for school administrators to facilitate learning opportunities for teachers that will allow them to be better prepared for future changes, whether they are with new academic standards or any other transition process.

### **Empirical Implications**

The findings of this study were based on lived experiences reported by teachers that went through the transition of previous academic standards to the implementation of new ones. This transition process created a platform where the participants had to shift their thinking, their planning processes, and make adaptations to their instructional practices. The lived experiences that were shared by the participants revealed that change is a process that is constant, and it can happen at any given time. Amid the negative emotions shared by the participants, they also reported motivation to understand the purpose and intent of the change in the new standards to achieve the desired outcome, which is the academic success of the students. Overall, the transition process was described with negative connotations and with the concern that students were not developmentally prepared to handle the rigor of the new standards. One of the main challenges that the participants reported was the lack of appropriate resources that would align with the standards. Working with collaborative teams was described as a positive factor in the transition process. The participants reported that working with a collaborative team was helpful

in many aspects. Team members would divide the planning process, create assessments, and share resources. All the participants described their lived experiences on the phenomenon as different stages of making adaptations to their instructional practices to accommodate an educational change. The new standards were adopted in the state of Florida in the school year of 2014-2015. However, this year, Governor DeSantis mandated the implementation of yet, another set of new academic standards called BEST standards, which stands for Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking. This means that teachers and school administrators will have to, once again, make the appropriate changes and undergo another transition process to adapt to new academic standards, which increases the relevance of this study. The findings of this study provided a different aspect of the topic of instructional practices and academic standards.

### **Practical Implications**

The lived experiences shared by the participants in this study provide insightful information to school administrators, policymakers, and other teachers in the state of Florida about the processes that teachers must undergo in the transition to the implementation of new academic standards. One of the experiences that the participants shared was that not all of them received adequate professional development, coaching, or high-quality training to fully prepared them for the rigor of the new academic standards. Alignment between the new standards and resources was another challenge reported, as well as appropriate resources to use in the classroom. Some participants shared that they felt they had lost any autonomy they had to make appropriate academic decisions regarding their instructional practices or how they should be rolling out the new standards to their students. The focus seems to be on prepping students to be proficient in the mandated end of the year testing at any cost and holding teacher accountable for the results of the testing. The scope of how the academic standards are presented and taught

seems to be with the sole intent of having the schools show proficiency in the standardized testing on reading and mathematics. Policymakers and school administrators can benefit from the findings of this study by including teachers' experiences, views, and ideas regarding the process of any academic transition. Understanding the relevance and importance of this process from the teachers' point of view and their experiences can improve teachers' motivation, by-in to further changes, and work environment. Any significant change in the classroom that stems from any type of education reform should come with the appropriate in-depth professional development, high-quality training, and effective coaching for teachers from the school district and school administrators.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

This research study was delimited to elementary school teachers with a minimum of eight years of teaching experience. The CCSS were adopted in the state of Florida in 2014, therefore teachers with less than eight years of experience would not have been appropriate for the study. Literature showed that there is a gap of information regarding the lived experiences that teachers had related to changes and adaptations to their instructional practices due to the implementation of the CCSS. The gap in the literature involved teachers in general. This group of elementary school teachers was selected in an effort to narrow this gap with meaningful data. Including teachers from elementary, middle, and high school would have extended the scope of the study beyond the purpose of the study. Another delimitation for the study is that only the Central Florida area was considered for the research. This area was selected because it represents a wider diversity of both teachers and students. Including a larger area would have been beyond the control and capability of the researcher. With these delimitations stated, there were various limitations of the study. One of the limitations was that there was only one male participant who

volunteered for the study. Although the data collected from his participation in the study correlated with the data from the female participants, data from a more even number of participants in regard to gender perhaps would have provided a different perspective on the phenomenon. Another limitation is that the study took place in one public elementary school. Initially, the intent was to include participants from two elementary schools to have a wider variety of teachers' backgrounds. However, because of the pandemic, obtaining approval for both sites in a timely manner was very difficult due to all the restrictions that schools were facing at the time the approval was sought. Approval for research was granted by the school district for only one school.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study there are several recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is that future studies should include a larger area of the state of Florida, not just the Central Florida area thus, including more schools. Participants reported during their semi-structured interviews and focus groups that their experiences on the phenomenon greatly depended upon where they were working at the time the CCSS were rolled out. Conducting research in a wider area including more school would provide a bigger picture of the phenomenon with more specific data that can elicit more themes. Another recommendation is that a bigger number of participants from different school levels (elementary, middle school, high school) should be used making sure that there are close to an even number of both male and female teachers for the study. With a bigger number of participants from different schools including both males and female teachers the finding of the research can be more generalized.

Future research should be conducted on the topic of what teachers experience during the process of adaptations and changes to their instructional practices because of changes in academic standards. This research would continue to be relevant because in 2022 grades K to third grade changed academic standards yet again. The new standards are called Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking or B.E.S.T. Next year the new standards will be rolled out to higher grades. This means that teachers will have to go through the same phenomenon they went through with the CCSS all over again. Because of the nature of the topic the recommended methodology design would be qualitative in nature. The phenomenology method design would be appropriate because it involves how the participants feel about the phenomenon being studied during an activity or event. This is an experience or perception-based research method. This method also allows an event or phenomenon be studied from different aspects. In this method the researcher can conduct interviews, surveys, analyze documents, watch videos, or visit places for data collection. All these types of data collection methods help check the validity of the data and the findings of the study.

### **Summary**

Provide a summary of the study. From your Implications section, reiterate what you consider to be the one or two most important “take-aways” from the results of your research (you may consider including an anecdotal illustration).

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB APROVAL

11/3/21, 8:05 PM Mail - Torres, Elsie F Riveiro - Outlook

**[External] IRB-FY20-21-867 - Initial: Initial - Exempt**

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>  
 Wed 11/3/2021 1:02 PM  
 To: Torres, Elsie F Riveiro <eriveiro@liberty.edu>; Necessary, Justin (Doctor of Education) <jnecessary@liberty.edu>

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[ EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content. ]

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## LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 3, 2021

Elsie Torres  
 Justin Necessary

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-867 TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON ADAPTATIONS TO INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES ON THE TRANSITION TO THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Elsie Torres, Justin Necessary,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/deleteditems/IdIAAQkADEz2mY3ZTgrLYWZKOWUINDQ0D505NzLW4LWZmODNYzIMCEwYQAQAD2CpVJNPdMUCVK...> 1/2

11/9/21, 8:05 PM

Mail - Torres, Elsie F Riveiro - Outlook

modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**

**APPENDIX B**  
**SITE APPROVAL LETTER**



## OCPS Application to Conduct Research Research Notice of Approval

Approval Date: **October 8, 2021**

Study ID Number: 334

Expiration Date: **October 7, 2022**

Project Title: *Teachers' Experiences on Adaptations to Instructional Practices on the Transition to the Florida Standards: A Phenomenological Study*

Requester: **Mrs. Elsie Riveiro Torres**

Sponsoring Agency/Organization/Institutional Affiliation: **Liberty University**

Thank you for your request to conduct research in Orange County Public Schools. We have reviewed and approved your application. This *Research Notice of Approval (R-NOA)* expires one year after issue date, October 7, 2022.

Additionally, we have received principal approval from the following school(s) to participate in your study:

- Waterford Elementary School: Principal Danielle Arbelaez-Willis, [danielle.arbelaezwillis@ocps.net](mailto:danielle.arbelaezwillis@ocps.net)

If you are interacting with OCPS staff, students or families, you may email the school-based or district-based administrators who have indicated interest in participating, including this notice as an attachment. After initial contact with applicable administrators, you may email any necessary staff included in your application. This approval notice does not obligate administrators, teachers, students, or families of students to participate in your research; participation is entirely voluntary.

You are responsible for submitting a Change/Renewal Request Form to this department prior to implementing any changes to the currently approved protocol. If any problems or unexpected adverse reactions occur as a result of this study, you must notify this department immediately. Allow 45 days prior to the expiration date, if you intend to submit a Change/Renewal Request Form to extend your R-NOA date. Otherwise, submit the Executive Summary (along with the provided Cover Page) to conclude your research with OCPS and within 45 calendar days of the R-NOA expiration. Email the form/summary to [research@ocps.net](mailto:research@ocps.net). All forms may be found at this [link](#).

Should you have questions, need assistance or wish to report an adverse event, please contact us at [research@ocps.net](mailto:research@ocps.net) or by phone at 407.317.3370.

Sincerely,

**Xiaogeng Sun, Ph. D.**

Director, Research and Evaluation

Orange County Public Schools

[research@ocps.net](mailto:research@ocps.net)

407.317.3200, Ext. 200-4730

2021.08.04





## APPENDIX C

### Consent

**Title of the Project:** Teacher's Experiences on Adaptations to Instructional Practices on the Transition to the Florida Standards: A Phenomenological Study

**Principal Investigator:** Elsie F. Riveiro, Ed. S., Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an elementary teacher at a public school with a minimum of 8 years of experience. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to determine teachers' perspectives on the challenges they encounter in their instructional practices to the Florida Standards. Teachers should be able to share their experiences about their processes on leaving behind academic standards they have been teaching for years and embracing all the changes that those new academic standards entail in their instructional practices. Many elementary teachers in the state of Florida will soon embark in the process of learning and incorporating the Florida B.E.S.T. Standards in their instructional practices to provide high quality education to all students so they can achieve their academic goal. This supports the objective of having high expectations for students learning according to the OCPS 2025 Strategic Plan.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in an interview that will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded.
2. Participate in a focus group that will take approximately 60 minutes. The session will be audio recorded.
3. Provide a copy of lesson plan that you developed for one of your classes based on the Florida Standards.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### How will personal information be protected?

Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to it.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews and focus groups sessions will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer. After three years, all records will be deleted.
- Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Orange County Public School system. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Elsie F. Riveiro. You may ask any questions you have now. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Necessary.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

#### **Your Consent**

**Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher/study team using the information provided above.**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

\_\_\_\_\_ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX D**

### **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS**

1. Describe your instructional practices prior to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
2. Describe your experiences in the process in planning a lesson in collaboration with peers.
3. What challenges and/or benefits have you experienced in your instructional practices in transitioning to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?
4. What learning experiences have you been provided by school administration to be better equipped to implement the CCSS in your instructional practices and how have those learning experiences helped make the proper adaptations to your instructional practices to implement the CCSS?
5. What specific changes or adaptations have been made to your instructional practices to implement the CCSS?
6. Describe your experience with what motivated you to engage in the transition process to CCSS?